This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

ANDOVER-HARVARD
THEOLOGICAL LIBRARY

LECTURES

ON THE

GOSPEL OF ST. MATTHEW;

DELIVERED IN THE

PARISH CHURCH OF ST. JAMES,

WESTMINSTER,

IN THE YEARS 1798, 1799, 1800, AND 1801.

BY THE RIGHT REVEREND
BEILBY PORTEUS, D. D.
BISHOP OF LONDON.

~~TWO VOLUMES IN ONE.~~

The first American from the fifth London Edition.

PRINTED FOR INCREASE COOKE & Co. AND SOLD BY THEM AT THEIR BOOK STORE, SOUTH CORNER OF THE GREEN, NEW-HAVEN, AND BY THE PRINCIPAL BOOK-SELLERS IN THE UNITED STATES.

From Sidney's Press.
1803.

(1078)

562.6
P849le
1803

TO THE

INHABITANTS

OF

LONDON AND WESTMINSTER,

THESE LECTURES,

WRITTEN PRINCIPALLY FOR THEIR BENEFIT, AND FAVORED WITH THEIR UNREMITTED ATTENDANCE FOR FOUR SUCCESSIVE YEARS,

ARE

WITH VERY SINCERE SENTIMENTS OF REGARD AND ESTEEM,

AND WITH ~~FERVANT~~ PRAYERS FOR THEIR HAPPINESS HERE AND HEREAFTER,

INSCRIBED,

BY

THEIR FAITHFUL AND AFFECTIONATE FRIEND AND SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.

EXTRACT FROM THE BRITISH CRITIC.

THESE LECTURES, *thus circumstanced,* written with an ardor of patriotism, a genuine thirst of piety, and a strong sense of duty; delivered with an animation and eloquence, for which, through life, the* BISHOP *of* LONDON *has been eminently distinguished; heard with deep and silent attention by admiring multitudes, are now presented to the public.*

How acceptable the public has considered the gift, sufficiently appears from the fact, that, in a very short interval of time, four editions have been actually disposed of, and a fifth is now in market.

As the public voice, and public gratitude have already stampt a value upon THESE LECTURES, *it would be idle, and superfluous to make any critical observations upon them, or to detain the reader with any circumstantial account of our private opinion of their merit.*

The truest mark of respect we can show to the venerable Author, as well as to the public, is to express our unfeigned wish, that their circulation may be circumscribed by no other limits, than those where the doctrines of Christianity are known and revered. They are calculated alike to do good to the learned, and the unlearned, the aged, as well as the inexperienced, the grave, and the reflecting, the gay, and the thoughtless.

They are learned without ostentation, pious without any tincture of enthusiasm, argumentative without pedantry, and perspicuous without losing sight of the graces of stile and diction.

May the excellent, and amiable PREACHER *still live to enjoy the consciousness, that his exertions in the cause of that religion, which he adorns by his example, have not been made in vain.*

* *See the Author's Preface.*

PREFACE.

AT the time when the following Lectures were first begun, the political, moral, and religious state of this kingdom, wore a very unfavorable aspect, and excited no small degree of uneasiness and alarm in every serious and reflecting mind. The enemies of this country were almost every where triumphant abroad, and its still more formidable enemies at home were indefatigably active in their endeavors to diffuse the poison of disaffection, infidelity, and contempt of the holy Scriptures, through every part of the kingdom, more especially among the lower orders of the people, by the most offensive and impious publications; while at the same time it must be acknowledged, that among too many of the higher classes, there prevailed, in the midst of all our distresses, a spirit of dissipation, profusion, and voluptuous gaiety, ill suited to the gloominess of our situation, and ill calculated to secure to us the protection of heaven against the various dangers that menaced us on every side. Under these circumstances, it seemed to be the duty of every friend to religion, morality, good order, and good government, and more especially of the ministers of the Gospel, to exert every power and every talent with which God had blessed them, in order to counteract the baneful effects of those pestilential writings which every day issued from the press; to give some check to the growing relaxation of public manners; to state plainly

and forcibly the evidences of our faith, and the genuine doctrines of our religion, the true principles of submission to our lawful governors, the mode of conduct in every relation of life which the Gospel prescribes to us; and to vindicate the truth, dignity, and divine authority of the sacred writings. All this, after much deliberation, I conceived could in no other way be so effectually done as by having recourse to those writings themselves, by going back to the very fountain of truth and holiness, and by drawing from that sacred source the proofs of its own celestial origin, and all the evangelical virtues springing from it, and branching out into the various duties of civil, social, and domestic life.

The result was, that I resolved on discharging *my* share of these weighty obligations, by giving Lectures on the Gospel of St. Matthew, in my own parish church of St. James, Westminster, every Friday in Lent; which at the same time that it promoted my principal object, might also draw a little more attention to that holy, but too much neglected season, which our Church has very judiciously set apart for the purpose of retirement and recollection, and of giving some little pause and respite to the ceaseless occupations and amusements of a busy and a thoughtless world. I foresaw, however, many difficulties in the undertaking, particularly in drawing together any considerable number of people to a place of public worship, for any length of time, on a common day of the week. But it pleased God to bless the attempt with a degree of success far beyond every thing I could have expected or imagined. And as I have been assured that several even of those amongst my audience, that disbe-

lieved or doubted the truth of Christianity, were impressed with a more favorable opinion both of its evidences and its doctrines, and with a higher veneration for the sacred writings than they had before entertained, I am willing to flatter myself that similar impressions may possibly be made on some of that description, who may chance to cast their eyes on these pages; and that they may also tend in some degree to confirm the faith and invigorate the good resolutions of many sincere believers in the Gospel. With this hope I now offer them to the world, and particularly to those whom Providence has placed under my more immediate superintendence, and to whom I am desirous to bequeath this (perhaps) last public testimony of my solicitude for their everlasting welfare. And whatever errors, imperfections, or accidental repetitions (arising from the recurrence of the same subjects in the sacred narrative) the critical reader may discover in this work; he will, I trust, be disposed to think them entitled to some degree of indulgence, when he reflects that it was not a very easy task to adapt either the matter or the language of such discourses as these to the various characters, conditions, circumstances, capacities, and wants of all those different ranks of people to whom they were addressed; and when he is also told, that these Lectures were drawn up at a very advanced period of life, and not in the ease and tranquility of literary retirement, but at short broken intervals of time, such as could be stolen from the incessant occupations of an arduous and laborious station, which would not admit of sufficient leisure for profound research or finished composition.

CONTENTS

OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

LECTURE I. Feb. 23, 1798.

A Compendious View of the Sacred Writings.

LECTURE II. March 2, 1798.

Matthew ii.

The Arrival and Offerings of the Wise Men at Bethlehem.

LECTURE III. March 9, 1798.

Matthew iii.

History and Doctrines of John the Baptist.

LECTURE IV. March 16, 1798.

Matthew iv.—Former Part.

Temptation of Christ in the Wilderness.

CONTENTS.

LECTURE V. MARCH 23, 1798.

MATTHEW iv.—Latter Part.

Choice of the Apostles.—Beginning of Miracles.

LECTURE VI. MARCH 30, 1798.

MATTHEW v.

Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount.

LECTURE VII. FEB. 8, 1799.

MATTHEW vi. and vii.

Continuation of the Sermon on the Mount.

LECTURE VIII. FEB. 15, 1799.

MATTHEW viii.

Conduct and Character of the Roman Centurion.

LECTURE IX. FEB. 22, 1799.

MATTHEW x.

Our Lord's Instructions to his Apostles.

LECTURE X. MARCH 1, 1799.

MATTHEW xii.

Observation of the Sabbath; Demoniacs; Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.

CONTENTS

LECTURE XI. MARCH 8, 1799.

MATTHEW xiii.

Nature and Use of Parables.

LECTURE XII. MARCH 15, 1799.

MATTHEW xiii. *continued,*

Parable of the Sower explained.

LECTURE XIII. FEB. 28, 1800.

MATTHEW xiii. *continued,*

Parable of the Tares explained.

CONTENTS

OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

LECTURE XIV. MARCH 7, 1800.

MATTHEW xiv.

History of Herod and Herodias.—Death of John the Baptist.

LECTURE XV. MARCH 14, 1800.

MATTHEW xvii.

The Transfiguration of Christ.

CONTENTS.

LECTURE XVI. March 21, 1800.

Matthew xviii.

Making our Brother to offend.—Parable of the unforgiving Servant.

LECTURE XVII. March 28, 1800.

Matthew xix.

The Means of attaining Eternal Life.—Difficulty of a Rich Man entering into the Kingdom of Heaven.

LECTURE XVIII. April 4, 1800.

Matthew xxii.

Parable of the Marriage Feast.—Insidious Questions put to Christ.—The Two great Commandments.

LECTURE XIX. Feb. 20, 1801.

Matthew xxiv.

Our Lord's Prediction of the Siege and Destruction of Jerusalem.

LECTURE XX. Feb. 27, 1801.

Matthew xxiv. xxv.

Further Remarks on the same Prophecy.—Parables of the Ten Virgins and of the Talents.—Day of Judgment.

LECTURE XXI. March 6, 1801.

Matthew xxvi.

Institution of the Lord's Supper.—Our Lord's Agony in the Garden.—Betrayed by Judas.—Carried before the High Prieſt.

LECTURE XXII. March 13, 1801.

Matthew xxvii.

Christ carried before Pilate—tried—condemned—and crucified.

LECTURE XXIII. March 20, 1801.

Matthew xxvii. xxviii.

Doctrine of Redemption.—Burial and Resurrection of our Blessed Lord.

LECTURE XXIV. March 27, 1801.

Matthew xxviii.

The Mysteries of Christianity.—Conclusion of the Gospel of St. Matthew, and of the Lectures.

LECTURE I.

IT being my intention to give from this place, on the Fridays during Lent, a courſe of Lectures explanatory and practical on ſuch parts of Scripture as ſeem to me beſt calculated to inform the underſtandings and affect the hearts of thoſe that hear me, I ſhall proceed, without further preface, to the execution of a deſign, in which edification, not entertainment, uſefulneſs, not novelty, are the objects I have in view; and in which therefore I may ſometimes perhaps avail myſelf of the labors of others, when they appear to me better calculated to anſwer my purpoſe than any thing I am myſelf capable of producing.

Although my obſervations will for the preſent be confined entirely to the Goſpel of St. Matthew, and only to certain ſelect parts even of that, yet it may not be improper or unprofitable to introduce theſe Lectures by a compendious view of the principal contents of thoſe writings which go under the general name of the HOLY SCRIPTURES.

That book which we call THE BIBLE (that is, THE BOOK, by way of eminence) alhough it is comprized in one volume, yet in fact comprehends a great number of different narratives and compoſitions, written at different times, by different perſons, in different languages, and on different ſubjects. And taking the whole of the collection together, it is an unqueſtionable truth that there is no one book extant, in any language, or in any country, which can in any degree be

compared with it for antiquity, for authority, for the importance, the dignity, the variety, and the curiosity of the matter it contains.

It begins with that great and stupendous event, of all others the earliest and most interesting to the human race, the creation of this world, of the heavens and the earth, of the celestiall luminaries, of man, and all the inferior animals, the herbs of the field, the sea and its inhabitants. All this it describes with a brevity and sublimity well suited to the magnitude of the subject, to the dignity of the Almighty Artificer, and unequalled by any other writer. The same wonderful scene is represented by a Roman poet,* who has evidently drawn his materials from the narrative of Moses. But though his description is finely imagined and elegantly wrought up, and embellished with much poetical ornament, yet in true simplicity and grandeur, both of sentiment and of diction, he falls far short of the sacred historian. LET THERE BE LIGHT AND THERE WAS LIGHT; is an instance of the sublime, which stands to this day unrivalled in any human composition.

But what is of infinitely greater moment, his history of the creation has settled for ever that most important question, which the ancient sages were never able to decide; from whence and from what causes this world, with all its inhabitant and appendages, drew its origin; whether from some inexplicable necessity, from a fortuitous concourse of atoms, from an eternal series of causes and effects, or from one supreme, intelligent, self-existing Being, the Author of all things, himself without beginning and without end. To this last cause the inspired historian has ascribed the formation of this system; and by so doing has established that great principle and foundation of all religion and all morality, and the great source of comfort to every human being, *the existence of one God*, the Creator and Preserver of the world, and the watchful Superintendent of all the creatures that he has made.

The Sacred History next sets before us, the primæval happiness of our first parents in Paradise; their fall from this

* Ovid.

blissful state by the wilful transgression of their Maker's command; the fatal effects of this original violation of duty; the universal wickedness and corruption it gradually introduced among mankind; and the signal and tremendous punishment of that wickedness by the deluge; the certainty of which is acknowledged by the most ancient writers, and very evident traces of which are to be found at this day in various parts of the globe. It then relates the peopling of the world again by the family of Noah; the covenant entered into by God with that patriarch, the relapse of mankind into wickedness; the calling of Abraham; and the choice of one family and people, the Israelites (or as they were afterwards called the Jews) who were separated from the rest of the world to preserve the knowledge and the worship of a Supreme Being, and the great fundamental doctrine of THE UNITY; while all the rest of mankind, even the wisest and most learned, were devoted to polytheism and idolatry, and the grossest and most abominable superstitions. It then gives us the history of this people, with their various migrations, revolutions, and principal transactions. It recounts their removal from the land of Canaan, and their establishment in Egypt under Joseph; whose history is related in a manner so natural, so interesting and affecting, that it is impossible for any man of common sensibility to read it without the strongest emotions of tenderness and delight.

In the book of Exodus we have the deliverance of this people from their bondage in Egypt, by a series of the most astonishing miracles; and their travels through the wilderness for forty years under the conduct of Moses; during which time (besides many other rules and directions for their moral conduct) they received the Ten Commandments, written on two tables of stone by the finger of God himself, and delivered by him to Moses with the most awful and tremendous solemnity; containing a code of moral law infinitely superior to any thing known to the rest of mankind in those rude and barbarous ages.

The books of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, are chiefly occupied with the various other laws, institutions, and regulations given to this people, respecting their civil

government, their moral conduct, their religious duties, and their ceremonial obſervances.

Among theſe, the book of Deuteronomy (which concludes what is called the Pentateuch, or five books of Moſes) is diſtinguiſhed above all the reſt by a conciſe and ſtriking recapitulation of the innumerable bleſſings and mercies which they had received from God ſince their departure from Horeb; by ſtrong expoſtulations on their paſt rebellious conduct, and their ſhameful ingratitude for all theſe diſtinguiſhing marks of the Divine favor; by many forcible and pathetic exhortations to repentance and obedience in future; by promiſes of the moſt ſubſtantial rewards, if they returned to their duty; and by denunciations of the ſevereſt puniſhments, if they continued diſobedient; and all this delivered in a ſtrain of the moſt animated, ſublime, and commanding eloquence.

The hiſtorical books of Joſhua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles, continue the hiſtory of the Jewiſh nation under their leaders, judges, and kings, for near a thouſand years; and one of the moſt prominent and inſtructive parts of this hiſtory is the account given of the life and reign of Solomon, his wealth, his power, and all the glories of his reign; more particularly that noble proof he gave of his piety and munificence, by the conſtruction of that truly magnificent temple which bore his name; the ſolemn and ſplendid dedication of this temple to the ſervice of God; and that inimitable prayer which he then offered up to Heaven in the preſence of the whole Jewiſh people; a prayer evidently coming from the heart, ſublime, ſimple, nervous, and pathetic; exhibiting the juſteſt and the warmeſt ſentiments of piety, the moſt exalted conceptions of the Divine nature, and every way equal to the ſanctity, the dignity, and the ſolemnity of the occaſion.

Next to theſe follow the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which contain the hiſtory of the Jews for a conſiderable period of time after their return from a captivity of 70 years in Babylon, about which time the name of Jews ſeems firſt to have been applied to them. The books of Ruth and Eſther are a kind of appendage to the public records, delineating the characters of two very amiable individuals, diſtinguiſhed by their virtues, and the very intereſting incidents

which befel them, the one in private, the other in public life, and which were in ſome degree connected with the honor and proſperity of the nation to which they belonged.

In the book of Job we have the hiſtory of a perſonage of high rank, of remote antiquity, and extraordinary virtues; rendered remarkable by uncommon viciſſitudes of fortune, by the moſt ſplendid proſperity at one time, by an accumulation of the heavieſt calamities at another; conducting himſelf under the former with moderation, uprightneſs, and unbounded kindneſs to the poor; and under the latter, with the moſt exemplary patience and reſignation to the will of Heaven. The compoſition is throughout the greater part highly poetical and figurative, and exhibits the nobleſt repreſentations of the Supreme Being and a ſuperintending Providence, together with the moſt admirable leſſons of fortitude and ſubmiſſion to the will of God under the ſevereſt afflictions that can befall human nature. The Pſalms, which follow this book, are full of ſuch exalted ſtrains of piety and devotion, ſuch beautiful and animated deſcriptions of the power, the wiſdom, the mercy, and the goodneſs of God, that it is impoſſible for any one to read them without feeling his heart inflamed with the moſt ardent affection towards the great Creator and Governor of the univerſe.

The Proverbs of Solomon, which come next in order, contain a variety of very excellent maxims of wiſdom, and invaluable rules of life, which have no where been exceeded except in the New-Teſtament. They afford us, as they profeſs to do at their very firſt outſet, "the inſtruction of wiſdom, juſtice, judgment, and equity. They give ſubtility to the ſimple; to the young man, knowledge and diſcretion."

The ſame may be ſaid of the greater part of the book of Eccleſiaſtes, which alſo teaches us to form a juſt eſtimate of this world, and its ſeeming advantages of wealth, honor, power, pleaſure, and ſcience.

The prophetical writings preſent us with the worthieſt and moſt exalted ideas of the Almighty, the juſteſt and pureſt notions of piety and virtue, the awfulleſt denunciations againſt wickedneſs of every kind, public and private; the

moſt affectionate expoſtulations, the moſt inviting promiſes, and the warmeſt concern for the public good. And beſides all this, they contain a ſeries of predictions relating to our bleſſed Lord, in which all the remarkable circumſtances of his birth, life, miniſtry, miracles, doctrines, ſufferings, and death, are foretold in ſo minute and exact a manner (more particularly in the prophecy of Iſaiah) that you would almoſt think they were deſcribing all theſe things after they had happened, if you did not know that theſe prophecies were confeſſedly written many hundred years before Chriſt came into the world, and were all that time in the poſſeſſion of the Jews, who were the mortal enemies of Chriſtianity, and therefore would never go about to forge prophecies, which moſt evidently prove him to be what he profeſſed to be, and what they denied him to be, the Meſſiah and the Son of God. It is to this part of ſcripture that our Lord particularly directs our attention, when he ſays, "ſearch the Scriptures, for they are they that teſtify of me."* The teſtimony he alludes to is that of the prophets; than which no evidence can be more ſatisfactory and convincing to any one that reads them with care and impartiality, and compares their predictions concerning our Saviour with the hiſtory of his life, given us by thoſe who conſtantly lived and converſed with him. This hiſtory we have in the New Teſtament, in that part of it which goes by the name of GOSPELS.

It is theſe that recount thoſe wonderful and important events with which the Chriſtian religion and the divine Author of it were introduced into the world, and which have produced ſo great a change in the principles, the manners, the morals, and the temporal as well as the ſpiritual condition of mankind. They relate the firſt appearance of Chriſt upon earth; his extraordinary and miraculous birth; the teſtimony borne to him by his forerunner John the Baptiſt; his temptation in the wilderneſs; the opening of his divine commiſſion; the pure, the perfect, the ſublime morality which he taught, eſpecially in his inimitable ſermon from the mount; the infinite ſuperiority which he ſhewed to every other moral teacher, both in the matter and manner of his diſcourſes; more particularly by cruſhing vice in its very

* John v. 39.

cradle, in the first risings of wicked desires and propensities in the heart; by giving a decided preference of the mild, gentle, passive, conciliating virtues, to that violent, vindictive, high-spirited, unforgiving temper, which has been always too much the favorite character of the world; by requiring us to forgive our very enemies, and to do good to them that hate us; by excluding from our devotions, our alms, and all our other virtues, all regard to fame, reputation, and applause; by laying down two great general principles of morality, love to God and love to mankind, and deducing from thence every other human duty; by conveying his instructions under the easy, familiar, and impressive form of parables; by expressing himself in a tone of dignity and authority unknown before; by exemplifying every virtue that he taught in his own unblemished and perfect life and conversation; and above all, by adding those awful sanctions, which he alone, of all moral instructors, had the power to hold out, eternal rewards to the virtuous, and eternal punishments to the wicked. The sacred narrative then represents to us the high character he assumed; the claim he made to a divine original; the wonderful miracles he wrought in proof of his divinity; the various prophecies which plainly marked him out as the Messiah, the great deliverer of the Jews; the declarations he made, that he came to offer himself a sacrifice for the sins of all mankind; the cruel indignities, sufferings, and persecutions, to which, in consequence of this great design, he was exposed; the accomplishment of it by the painful and ignominious death to which he submitted; by his resurrection after three days from the grave; by his ascension into heaven; by his sitting there at the right hand of God, and performing the office of a mediator and an intercessor for the sinful sons of men, till he comes a second time in his glory to sit in judgment on all mankind, and decide their final doom of happiness or misery for ever.

These are the momentous, the interesting truths, on which the GOSPELS principally dwell.

The ACTS OF THE APOSTLES continue the history of our religion after our Lord's ascension; the astonishing and rapid

propagation of it by a few illiterate tent-makers and fiſhermen, through almoſt every part of the world, "by demonſtration of the ſpirit and of power;" without the aid of eloquence or of force, and in oppoſition to all the authority, all the power, and all the influence of the opulent and the great.

The EPISTLES, that is, the letters addreſſed by the Apoſtles and their aſſociates to different churches and to particular individuals, contain many admirable rules and directions to the primitive converts; many affecting exhortations, expoſtulations, and reproofs; many explanations and illuſtrations of the doctrines delivered by our Lord; together with conſtant references to facts, circumſtances, and events, recorded in the Goſpels and the Acts; in which we perceive ſuch ſtriking, yet evidently ſuch unpremeditated and undeſigned coincidences and agreements between the narratives and the epiſtles, as form one moſt concluſive argument for the truth, authenticity, and genuineneſs of both.*

The ſacred volume concludes with the Revelation of St. John, which, under the form of viſions and various ſymbolical repreſentations, preſents to us a prophetic hiſtory of the Chriſtian religion in future times, and the various changes, viciſſitudes, and revolutions it was to undergo in different ages and countries to the end of the world.†

Is it poſſible now to conceive a nobler, a more comprehenſive, a more uſeful ſcheme of inſtruction than this; in which the uniformity and variety, ſo happily blended together, give it an inexpreſſible beauty, and the whole compoſition plainly proves its Author to be divine?

"The Bible is not indeed (as a great writer obſerves‡) a

* See the Horæ Paulinæ of Dr. Paley.

† A fuller and more detailed account of the contents of the ſeveral Books of Scripture may be found in Mr. Gray's *Key to the Old Teſtament*, Bp. Percy's *to the New*, and the Biſhop of Lincoln's late excellent work on the *Elements of Chriſtian Theology*. That part of it which relates to the Scriptures has been lately re-printed for the accommodation of the public at large, in a duodecimo volume, which I particularly recommend to the attention of my readers.

‡ Archbiſhop Secker, V. 6.

plan of religion delineated with minute accuracy, to inſtruct men as in ſomething altogether new, or to excite a vain admiration and applauſe; but it is ſomewhat unſpeakably more great and noble, comprehending (as we have ſeen) in the grandeſt and moſt magnificent order, along with every eſſential of that plan, the various diſpenſations of God to mankind, from the formation of this earth to the conſummation of all things. *Other* books may afford us much entertainment and much inſtruction; may gratify our curioſity, may delight our imagination, may improve our underſtandings, may calm our paſſions, may exalt our ſentiments, may even improve our hearts. But they have not, they cannot have that authority in what they affirm, in what they require, in what they promiſe and threaten, that the Scriptures have. There is a peculiar weight and energy in *them*, which is not to be found in any other writings. Their denunciations are more awful, their convictions ſtronger, their conſolations more powerful, their counſels more authentic, their warnings more alarming, their expoſtulations more penetrating. There are paſſages in them throughout ſo ſublime, ſo pathetic, full of ſuch energy and force upon the heart and conſcience, yet without the leaſt appearance of labour and ſtudy for that purpoſe; indeed, the deſign of the whole is ſo noble, ſo well ſuited to the ſad condition of human kind; the morals have in them ſuch purity and dignity; the doctrines, ſo many of them above reaſon, yet ſo perfectly reconcileable with it; the expreſſion is ſo majeſtic, yet familiarized with ſuch eaſy ſimplicity, that the more we read and ſtudy theſe writings with pious diſpoſitions and judicious attention, the more we ſhall ſee and feel of the hand of God in them."*

* That accompliſhed ſcholar and diſtinguiſhed writer, the late Sir William Jones, chief juſtice of Bengal, at the end of his Bible wrote the following note; which, coming from a man of his profound erudition, and perfect knowledge of the oriental languages, cuſtoms, and manners, muſt be conſidered as a moſt powerful teſtimony, not only to the ſublimity, but to the divine inſpiration of the ſacred writings.

"I have (ſays he) regularly and attentively read theſe Holy Scriptures, and am of opinion, that this volume, independently of its divine origin, contains more true ſublimity, more exquiſite beauty, more pure morality, more important hiſtory, and finer ſtrains both of poetry and eloquence, than can be collected from all other books, in whatever age or language they may have been compoſed.

But that which ſtamps upon them the higheſt value, that which renders them, ſtrictly ſpeaking, *ineſtimable*, and diſtinguiſh them from all other books in the world, is this, that they and they only, "*contain the words of eternal life.*"* In this reſpect, every other book, even the nobleſt compoſitions of man, muſt fail us; they cannot give us that which we moſt want, and what is of infinitely more importance to us than all other things put together, ETERNAL LIFE.

This we muſt look for no where but in Scripture. It is there, and there only, that we are informed from authority, of the immortality of the ſoul, of a general reſurrection from the dead, of a future judgment, of a ſtate of eternal happineſs to the good, and of eternal miſery to the bad. It is there we are made acquainted with the fall of our firſt parents from a ſtate of innocence and happineſs; with the guilt, corruption, and miſery, which this ſad event brought on all their poſterity; which, together with their own perſonal and voluntary tranſgreſſions, rendered them obnoxious to God's ſevereſt puniſhments. But, to our inexpreſſible comfort, we are further told in this divine book, that God is full of mercy, compaſſion, and goodneſs; that he is not extreme to mark what is done amiſs; that he willeth not the death of a ſinner, but rather that he ſhould turn from his wickedneſs, and ſave his ſoul alive. In pity therefore to mankind, he was pleaſed to provide a remedy for their dreadful ſtate. He was pleaſed to adopt a meaſure which ſhould at once ſatisfy his juſtice, ſhew his extreme abhorrence of ſin, make a ſufficient atonement for the ſins of the whole world, and releaſe all who accepted the terms propoſed to them from the puniſhment they had deſerved. This was nothing leſs than the death of his ſon Jeſus Chriſt, whom he ſent into the world to take our nature upon him, to teach us

* The two parts, of which the Scriptures conſiſt, are connected by a chain of compoſitions, which bear no reſemblance, in form or ſtile, to any that can be produced from the ſtories of Grecian, Perſian, or even Arabian learning: the antiquity of thoſe compoſitions no man doubts; and the unſtrained application of them to events long ſubſequent to their publication, is a ſolid ground of belief that they are genuine predictions, and conſequently inſpired."

* John, vi. 68.

a moſt holy, pure, and benevolent religion, to reform us both by his precepts and example; and laſtly, to die for our ſins, and to riſe again for our juſtification. By him and his evangeliſts and apoſtles we are aſſured, that if we ſincerely repent of our ſins, and firmly believe in him and his Goſpel, we ſhall, for the ſake of his ſufferings and his righteouſneſs, have all our tranſgreſſions forgiven and blotted out, ſhall be *juſtified*, that is, conſidered as innocent in the ſight of God, ſhall have the aſſiſtance of his Holy Spirit for our future conduct; and if we perſevere to the end in a uniform (though, from the infirmity of our nature, imperfect) obedience to all the laws of Chriſt, ſhall, through his merits, be rewarded with everlaſting glory in the life to come.

Since then the utility, the abſolute neceſſity of reading the Scriptures is ſo great, ſince they are not only the beſt guide you can conſult, but the only one that can poſſibly lead you to heaven; it becomes the indiſpenſable duty of every one of you moſt carefully and conſtantly to peruſe theſe ſacred oracles, that you may thereby "become perfect, thoroughly furniſhed to every good work."* They who have much leiſure ſhould employ a conſiderable ſhare of it in this holy exerciſe, and even they who are moſt immerſed in buſineſs have, or ought to have, the Lord's Day entirely to ſpare, and ſhould always employ ſome part of it (more particularly at this holy ſeaſon) in reading and meditating on the word of God. By perſevering ſteadily in this practice, any one may, in no great length of time, read the Scriptures through, from one end to the other. But in doing this, it would be adviſeable to begin with the New Teſtament firſt, and to read it over moſt frequently, becauſe it concerns us Chriſtians the moſt nearly, and explains to us more fully and more clearly the words of eternal life. But after you have once gone regularly through both the Old Teſtament and the New, it may then be moſt uſeful, perhaps, to ſelect out of each ſuch paſſages as lay before you the great fundamental doctrines, and moſt eſſential duties, of your Chriſtian profeſſion; and even amongſt theſe, to dwell the longeſt on ſuch as expreſs theſe things in the moſt awful and ſtriking manner, ſuch as affect and touch you moſt powerfully, ſuch

* 2 Tim. iii. 17.

as make your heart burn within you, and ſtir up all the pious affections in your ſoul. But it will be of little uſe to *read*, unleſs at the ſame time alſo you *reflect*; unleſs you apply what you read to thoſe great purpoſes which the Scriptures were meant to promote, the amendment of your faults, the improvement of your hearts, and the ſalvation of your ſouls.

To aſſiſt you in this moſt important and neceſſary work is the deſign of theſe Lectures: and in the execution of this deſign I ſhall have theſe four objects principally in view:

Firſt, to explain and illuſtrate thoſe paſſages of holy writ, which are in any degree difficult and obſcure.

2dly. To point out, as they occur in the ſacred writings, the chief leading fundamental principles and doctrines of the Chriſtian religion.

3dly. To confirm and ſtrengthen your faith, by calling your attention to thoſe ſtrong internal marks of the truth and divine authority of the Chriſtian religion, which preſent themſelves to us in almoſt every page of the Goſpel.

4thly. To lay before you the great moral precepts of the Goſpel, to preſs them home upon your conſciences and your hearts, and render them effectual to the important ends they were intended to ſerve; namely, the due government of your paſſions, the regulation of your conduct, and the attainment of everlaſting life.

Theſe are all of them objects of the very laſt importance; they are worthy the attention of every human being; and they will, I think, be better attained by a familiar and practical explanation of the ſacred writings, than by any other ſpecies of compoſition whatever.

The plan of inſtruction adopted by our bleſſed Lord was unqueſtionably the very beſt that could be deviſed. It was not a regular ſyſtem of ethics, delivered in a connected ſeries of dry eſſays and diſſertations, like thoſe of the ancient heathen philoſophers; but it conſiſted of familiar diſcourſes, intereſting parables, ſhort ſententious maxims, and occaſional reflections, ariſing from the common occurrences of life,

and the moſt obvious appearances of nature. All theſe various modes of inſtruction are ſo judiciouſly blended and mixed together in the hiſtory of our Lord's life and converſation, delivered to us in the Goſpel (as all the various ſorts of pleaſing objects are in the unornamented ſcenes of nature) that they make a much deeper impreſſion both on the underſtanding and on the heart, than they could poſſibly do in any other more artificial form.

An expoſition of Scripture, then, muſt at all times be highly uſeful and intereſting to every ſincere diſciple of Chriſt; but muſt be peculiarly ſo at the preſent moment, when ſo much pains have been taken to ridicule and revile the ſacred writings, to ſubvert the very foundations of our faith, and to poiſon the minds of all ranks of people, but eſpecially the middling and the lower claſſes, by the moſt impious and blaſphemous publications that ever diſgraced any Chriſtian country.* To reſiſt theſe wicked attempts is the duty of every miniſter of the Goſpel; and as I have ſtrongly exhorted all thoſe who are under my ſuperintendence, to exert themſelves with zeal and with vigour in defence of their inſulted religion, I think it incumbent on me to take my ſhare in this important conteſt, and to ſhew that I wiſh not to throw burthens on others of which I am not willing to bear my full proportion. As long therefore as my health, and the various duties of an extenſive and populous dioceſe, will permit, and the exigencies of the times require ſuch exertions, I propoſe to continue annually theſe Lectures. And I ſhall think it no unbecoming concluſion of my life, if theſe labours of my declining years ſhould tend in any degree to render the Holy Scriptures more clear and intelligible, more uſeful and delightful; if they ſhall confirm the faith, reform the manners, conſole and revive the hearts of thoſe who hear me; and vindicate the honor of our divine Maſter from thoſe groſs indignities and inſults, which have of late been ſo indecently and impiouſly thrown on him and his religion.

* About this time, and for ſome years before, *The Age of Reaſon*, and other peſtilent writings of the ſame nature, were diſſeminated through almoſt every diſtrict of this country with incredible induſtry.

LECTURE II.

MATTHEW ii.

HAVING in the preceding Lecture taken a ſhort comprehenſive view of the ſeveral books of the ſacred volume, I now proceed to the Goſpel of St. Matthew; and ſhall in this Lecture confine myſelf to the two firſt chapters of that book.*

The hiſtory of our Saviour's birth, life, doctrines, precepts, and miracles, is contained in four books or narratives called Goſpels, written at different times, and by four different perſons, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, who were among the firſt converts to Chriſtianity, and perfectly well acquainted with the facts they relate; to which two of them were eye-witneſſes, and the other two conſtant companions of thoſe who were ſo, from whom they received immediately every thing they relate. This is better authority for the truth of theſe hiſtories than we have for the greater part of the hiſtories now extant, the fidelity of which we do not in the leaſt queſtion. For few of our beſt hiſtories, either ancient or modern, were written by perſons who were eye-witneſſes of all the tranſactions which they relate; and there is ſcarce any inſtance of the hiſtory of the ſame perſon being written by four different contemporary hiſtorians, all perfectly agreeing in the main articles, and differing only in a few minute particulars of no moment. This however we find actually done in the life of Jeſus, which has been written by each of the four evangeliſts, and it is a very ſtrong proof of their veracity. For let us conſider what the caſe is, at this very day, in the affairs of common life. When four different perſons are called upon in a court of juſtice to prove the

* For ſome very valuable obſervations in ſome parts of this, and the third and thirteenth Lecture, I am indebted to my late excellent friend and patron, Arch-biſhop Secker.

reality of any particular fact that happened twenty or thirty years ago, what is the sort of evidence which they usually give? Why, in all the great leading circumstances which tend to establish the fact in question, they in general perfectly agree. In a few other points perhaps they differ. But then these are points which do not at all affect the main question, which were too trifling to make much impression at the time on the memory of the observers, and which therefore they would all relate with some little variation in their account. This is precisely the case with the writers of the four Gospels; and this substantial coincidence and accidental variation has much more the air and garb of truth, than where there is a perfect agreement in every the minutest article; which has too much the appearance of a concerted story.

That the books which we now have under the names of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, were written by the persons whose names they bear, cannot admit the smallest doubt with any unprejudiced mind. They have been acknowledged as such by every Christian church in every age, from the time of our Saviour to this moment. There are allusions to them, or quotations from them, in the earliest writers, as far back as the age of the apostles, and continued down in a regular succession to the present hour; a proof of authenticity, which scarce any other ancient book in the world can produce. They were received as genuine histories, not only by the first Christians, but by the first *enemies* of Christianity, and their authority was never questioned either by the ancient heathens or Jews.*

The first of these Gospels is that of St. Matthew. It was written probably at the latest not more than fifteen years, some think only eight years, after our Lord's ascension. The author of it was an apostle and constant companion of Jesus, and of course an eye-witness of every thing he relates. He was called by our blessed Lord from a most lucrative occupation, that of a collector of the public revenue, to be one of his disciples and friends: a call which he immediately

* Whoever wishes for further satisfaction on this most important subject, will not fail of finding it in Dr. Lardner's learned work, *The Credibility of the Gospel History*, where this question has been very ably treated, and the authenticity of the Gospels established on the most solid grounds.

obeyed, relinquiſhing every thing that was dear and valuable to him in the preſent life. This is a ſacrifice which few people have made for the ſake of religion, and had St. Matthew's object been the applauſe of men, he might have diſplayed the merits of this ſacrifice in a light very favorable to himſelf. But the apoſtle, conſcious of much nobler views, deſcribes this tranſaction in the ſimpleſt and moſt artleſs words. "As Jeſus," ſays he, "paſſed forth from thence, he ſaw a man named Matthew, ſitting at the receipt of cuſtom, and he ſaith unto him, Follow me: and he aroſe and followed him."

The firſt thing that occurs in the Goſpel of St. Matthew, is the genealogy of Chriſt, in order to prove that he was deſcended from the houſe and family of David, as the prophets foretold he ſhould be.

In this genealogy there are confeſſedly ſome difficulties, at which we cannot be much ſurpriſed, when we conſider of what prodigious antiquity this genealogy is, going back ſome thouſands of years; and when we know too that ſeveral Jewiſh perſons had the ſame name, and that the ſame perſon had different names, (eſpecially under the Babyloniſh captivity) which is ſtill the caſe in India, and other parts of Aſia. This muſt neceſſarily create ſome perplexity, eſpecially at ſuch a diſtance as we are from the firſt ſources of information. But to the Jews themſelves at the time, there were probably no difficulties at all; and it does not appear that they (who were certainly the beſt judges of the queſtion) made any objection to this genealogy of Chriſt, or denied him to be deſcended from the family of David. We may therefore reaſonably conclude, that his deſcent was originally admitted to be fairly made out by the evangeliſts, whatever obſcurities may have ariſen ſince. Indeed it is highly probable, that this genealogy was taken from ſome public records or regiſters of the ancient Jewiſh families, which is very evident from Joſephus that the Jews had, eſpecially with regard to the lineage of David, and which were univerſally known and acknowledged to be authentic documents. I ſhall therefore only obſerve further on this head, that St. Matthew gives the pedigree of Joſeph, and St. Luke that of Mary.

But they both come to the ſame thing, becauſe among the Jews the pedigree of the huſband was conſidered as the *legal* pedigree of the wife; and as Mary and Joſeph were nearly related, and were of the ſame tribe and family, their genealogies of courſe muſt run nearly in the ſame line.

After the genealogy of Chriſt, follows an account of his birth, which, as we may eaſily ſuppoſe of ſo extraordinary a perſon, had ſomething in it very extraordinary. Accordingly the evangeliſt tells us, "that the angel of the Lord appeared unto Joſeph in a dream," ſaying, "Joſeph, thou ſon of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghoſt: and ſhe ſhall bring forth a ſon, and thou ſhalt call his name Jeſus (that is a Saviour;) for he ſhall ſave his people from their ſins."*

This undoubtedly was a moſt wonderful, and ſingular, and unexampled event. But it was natural to imagine, that when the Son of God was to appear upon the ſcene, he would enter upon it in a way ſomewhat different from the ſons of men. And in fact we find him appearing upon earth in a manner perfectly new, and peculiar to himſelf; in a manner which united in itſelf at once the evidence of prophecy and of miracle. He was born of a virgin, and what is no leſs wonderful, it was predicted of him ſeven hundred years before that he ſhould be ſo born. "Behold," ſays Iſaiah, "a virgin ſhall conceive and bear a ſon, and they ſhall call his name Immanuel;"† a Hebrew word, ſignifying, *God with us*. What man, but a prophet, inſpired of God, could have foreſeen an event ſo completely improbable, and apparently impoſſible? What impoſtor would have hazarded ſuch a prediction as this? and, what is ſtill of more importance, what impoſtor could have fulfilled it? What leſs than the power of God could have enabled Jeſus to fulfil it? By that power he *did* fulfil it. He only, of the whole human race, did fulfil it, and thus proved himſelf to be at the very moment of his birth, what the whole courſe of his future life, his death, his reſurrection, and his aſcenſion into heaven, further declared him to be, THE SON OF GOD.

* Matt. i. 20. † Iſaiah, vii. 14.

And as ſuch he was ſoon acknowledged, and due homage paid to his divinity by a very ſingular embaſſy, and in a very ſingular manner. For the evangeliſt proceeds to tell us in the beginning of the ſecond chapter, that "when Jeſus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, there came wiſe men from the eaſt to Jeruſalem, ſaying, where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have ſeen his ſtar in the eaſt, and are come to worſhip him." As this is a very remarkable, and very important event, I ſhall employ the remaining part of this lecture in explaining it to you at large, ſubjoining ſuch reflections as naturally ariſe from it.

The name of theſe perſons, whom our tranſlation calls *wiſe men*, is in the original *magoi*, in the Latin language, *magi*, from whence is derived our Engliſh word, magicians. The magi were a ſet of ancient philoſophers, living in the eaſtern part of the world, collected together in colleges, addicted to the ſtudy of aſtronomy, and other parts of natural philoſophy, and highly eſteemed throughout the eaſt, having juſter ſentiments of God and his worſhip than any of the ancient heathens: for they abhorred the adoration of images made in the form of men and animals, and though they *did* repreſent the Deity under the ſymbol of fire (the pureſt and moſt active of all material ſubſtances) yet they worſhipped *one only God*; and ſo blameleſs did their ſtudies and their religion appear to be, that the prophet Daniel, ſcrupulous as he was to the hazard of his life, with reſpect to the Jewiſh religion, did not refuſe to accept the office which Nebuchadnezzar gave him, of being maſter of the magi, and chief governor over all the wiſe men of Babylon.* They were therefore evidently the fitteſt of all the ancient heathens to have the firſt knowledge of the Son of God, and of ſalvation by him imparted to them.

The country from whence they came is only deſcribed in St. Matthew as lying eaſt from Judea, and therefore might be either Perſia, where the principal reſidence of the magi was, or elſe Arabia, to which ancient authors ſay they did, and undoubtedly they eaſily might extend themſelves; which it is well known abounded in the valuable things that their

* Vid. Dan. v. 11.

preſents conſiſted of; and concerning which the ſeventy-ſecond Pſalm (plainly ſpeaking of the Meſſiah) ſays, "The kings of Arabia and Saba, or Sabæa (an adjoining region) ſhall bring gifts;" and again, "unto him ſhall be given of the gold of Arabia."

Suppoſing this prophecy of the Pſalmiſt to point out the perſons whoſe journey the evangeliſt relates, it will alſo determine what their ſtation or rank in life was, namely *kings*, "the kings of Arabia and Saba." Of this circumſtance St. Matthew ſays nothing directly, but their offerings are a ſufficient evidence that their condition could not be a mean one: and though there is certainly no proof, there is, on the other hand, no improbability, of their being lords of ſmall ſovereignties, which might afford them a claim, according to the ancient uſage of that part of the world, to the name of kings. For we read in Scripture not only of ſome ſmall* towns or tracts that had each of them their king, but of ſome alſo which could not be very large, that had each of them ſeveral.†

What number of the wiſe men, or magi, came to our Lord, is entirely unknown, and perhaps that of three was imagined for no other reaſon, than becauſe the gifts which they brought were of three ſorts. The occaſion of their coming is expreſſed by St. Matthew in their own words: "Where is He that is born king of the Jews? for we are come to worſhip him."

That a very extraordinary perſon was to appear under this character about that time, was a very general perſuaſion throughout the eaſt; as not only Jewiſh but heathen writers tell us, in conformity with the New Teſtament. And that this perſon was to have dominion over the whole earth, was part of that perſuaſion, founded on predictions of the cleareſt import. I need produce but one, from the above-mentioned 72d Pſalm, which, as I before obſerved, plainly relates to Chriſt. "All kings ſhall fall down before him; all nations ſhall do him ſervice." There were Jews enough even in Perſia, and much more in Arabia, to propagate this doctrine, and ſhew it to be contained in their ſacred books;

* Joſh. x. 5. † Jerem. xxv. 20—26.

from whence therefore the wiſe men may well be ſuppoſed to have received it.

But their knowledge that he was actually born, muſt ſtand on ſome other foundation; and what that was, themſelves declare, "We have ſeen his ſtar in the eaſt."* This muſt plainly mean ſome new appearance in the ſky, which they, whoſe profeſſion (as is well known) led them peculiarly to the ſtudy of aſtronomy, had obſerved in the heavens. Now any appearance of a body of light in the air, is called by the Greek and Latin authors a *ſtar*, though it be only a *meteor*, that is, a tranſient accidental luminous vapor, neither of conſiderable height, nor long continuance; in which ſenſe alſo the Scripture ſpeaks of *ſtars falling from Heaven*.† And ſuch was that which the wiſe men ſaw, as will appear from a circumſtance to be mentioned hereafter. Poſſibly indeed the firſt light which ſurprized them, might be that mentioned by St. Luke, when the *glory of the Lord* deſcending from Heaven, ſhone round about the ſhepherds, and his angel came upon them, to bring them the news of our Saviour's nativity.‡ For that glory, ſeen at a diſtance, might have the appearance of a ſtar; and their ſeeing the ſtar in *the eaſt*, is not to be underſtood as if they ſaw it to the eaſtward of themſelves; but means, that they being eaſtward of Judea, ſaw the ſtar, ſeeming probably to hang over that country.

Now ſuch an uncommon ſight alone, ſuppoſing their expectation of *him raiſed* (as there was then a general expectation of him) might naturally incline them to think he was come; and eſpecially as it was a current opinion amongſt perſons profeſſing ſkill in theſe matters, that the ſhining forth of a new ſtar denoted the riſe of a new kingdom, or of a great and extraordinary prince; whence, as Pliny relates,‖ Auguſtus the Roman emperor ſaid, that the comet which appeared on Cæſar's death, whom he ſucceeded, was born for him, and that he was born in that comet; for ſo it ſeems he expreſſed himſelf.

* Matth. ii. 2.
† Matt. xxiv. 29. Mark, xiii. 25.
‡ Luke, ii. 9.
‖ Vid. Plin. Nat. Hiſt. L. ii. Ch. 25.

This, I say, being a current opinion, the wise men would be apt enough to conclude, that the present star betokened the birth of that prince, of whom (as they might easily have heard) it had been so very long foretold, "There shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel."* And it is a very remarkable circumstance, that one of the ancient commentators on the Timæus of Plato,† alluding to this very star, expresses himself in these words: "There is a still more venerable and sacred tradition, which relates, that by the rising of a certain uncommon star, was foretold, not diseases or deaths, but the descent of an adorable God for the salvation of the human race, and the melioration of human affairs; which star, they say, was observed by the Chaldæans, who came to present their offerings to the new-born God."‡

On their arrival at Jerusalem, and making the enquiry they come for, Herod, we find, was *troubled*, and all Jerusalem with him. That so jealous a tyrant as Herod should be *troubled* at this event is no wonder; and it is no less natural that the people also should be disturbed and alarmed, not knowing what the consequences of so extraordinary a birth might be. Herod, therefore, calls the chief priests and scribes together, and demands of them, whether it were known where THE CHRIST should be born; and having learnt from them, that, according to the prophet Micah, Bethlehem was the place appointed by Heaven, sends the wise men thither with a request that they would inform him when they had found the child, that he also might go and pay him due homage, intending all the while to destroy him, when he had obtained the requisite intelligence. Accordingly the wise men proceeded on their journey from Jerusalem to Bethlehem; when the same luminous appearance, which they had observed in their own country, now attended them again to their very great joy, and conducted them at length to the very house where the child was; which probably (as is common in villages) had no other house contiguous to it, and therefore might be easily marked by the situation of the meteor.

* Numb xxiv 17. † Chaloidius.
‡ See Brucker's History of Philosophy, v. iii. p. 472.

When the wiſe men came into the houſe and ſaw the child, they fell down and worſhipped him, that is, bowed and proſtrated themſelves before him, in the eaſtern manner of doing obeiſance to kings. Whether they deſigned alſo paying him religious adoration, or how diſtinct a knowledge had been given them of the nature and rank of the Saviour of the world, we cannot ſay; but may be ſure, that what they believed and what they did, was at that time ſufficient to procure them acceptance with God. Indeed, according to the opinion of ſome ancient fathers concerning their preſents, their faith muſt have been very great. For they repreſent the incenſe, as offered to our Saviour as God; the gold to have been paid as tribute to a king; and the myrrh (a principal ingredient uſed in embalming) brought as an acknowledgment that he was to die for men. But others interpret the ſame gifts very differently, and take them to ſignify the three ſpiritual offerings, which we muſt all preſent to Heaven, through Jeſus Chriſt; the incenſe to denote piety towards God; the gold, charity towards our fellow-creatures; and the myrrh, purity of ſoul and body; it being highly efficacious in preſerving them from corruption. But though either or both theſe notions may be piouſly and innocently entertained, yet all we know with certainty is, that in thoſe parts of the world no one did then or does now appear before a prince, without a ſuitable preſent, uſually of the moſt valuable commodities of his country; and that three of the principal productions of the eaſt, particularly of Arabia, were gold, frankincenſe, and myrrh.

How the wiſe men were affected with the ſight of ſo unſpeakably important a perſon, in ſuch mean circumſtances; or Joſeph and Mary, and all that muſt flock around them, with ſo humble an addreſs from ſtrangers of ſuch high dignity; and what further paſſed in conſequence of this on either ſide, every one may in ſome degree imagine; but no one can undertake to relate, ſince the Goſpels do not. We are there only told, that theſe reſpectable viſitors, having paid their duty in this manner, and being warned of God not to return to Herod,* "departed into their own country another way."

* Matth. ii. 12.

Thus ends this remarkable piece of hiſtory, in which all the circumſtances are ſo perfectly conformable to the manners, the cuſtoms, the prevailing opinions and notions of thoſe times, in which the narrative is ſuppoſed to have been written, that they tend greatly to confirm the truth and credibility of the ſacred hiſtory. I have already in going along touched ſlightly on ſome of theſe circumſtances, but it may be uſeful here to draw them all into one point of view.

1. In the firſt place, then, the journey of theſe wiſe men, and the object of it, namely, to find out him who was born king of the Jews, correſponds exactly to the information given by ſeveral heathen authors,* that there was in thoſe days a general expectation of ſome very extraordinary perſonage, who was to make his appearance at that particular period of time, and in that particular part of the world.

2. If the birth of this extraordinary perſonage was marked by a new ſtar or meteor in the heavens, it was very natural that it ſhould firſt ſtrike the obſervation of thoſe called the *wiſe men*, who lived in a country where the ſtars and the planets ſhone with uncommon luſtre, where the ſcience of aſtronomy was (for that reaſon perhaps) particularly cultivated, where it was the peculiar profeſſion of theſe very magi, or wiſe men, and where no remarkable appearance in the heavens could eſcape the many curious eyes that were conſtantly fixed upon them.

3. The *manner* in which theſe wiſe men approached our Lord, is preciſely that in which the people always addreſſed themſelves to men of high rank and dignity.

They *worſhipped* him; that is, they proſtrated themſelves to the ground before him, which we know was then and ſtill is the cuſtom of thoſe countries.

They *offered preſents* to him; and it is well known, that without a preſent no great man was at that time or is now approached.

Theſe preſents were gold, frankincenſe, and myrrh; and theſe, as we have before obſerved, were the natural produc-

* Vid. Tacit Hiſt. v. 13. Sueton. in vita Veſp. c. 4.

tions of that country whence the wise men are supposed to have come, namely, Arabia or Sabæa.

Even that dreadful transaction, which was the unfortunate consequence of their journey, the murder of the innocents, exactly corresponds with the character of Herod, who was one of the most cruel and ferocious tyrants that ever disgraced a throne; and amongst other horrible barbarities had put to death a son of his own. No wonder then that his jealousy should prompt him to murder a number of infants, not at all related to him.

All these circumstances concur to prove that the sacred historians lived in the times and the countries in which they are supposed to have written the Gospels, and were perfectly well acquainted with every thing they relate. Had not this been the case, they must have been detected in an error, in some of the many incidents they touched upon, which yet has never happened.

4. It is also in the last place worthy of remark, that every thing is here related with the greatest plainness, brevity, and simplicity, without any of that ostentation and parade which we so often meet with in other authors. Thus, for instance, a heathen writer would have put a long and eloquent speech into the mouth of the wise men, and would have provided the parents of the infant with a suitable answer. He would have painted the massacree of the infants in the most dreadful colours, and would have drawn a most affecting picture of the distress and agony of their afflicted parents. But the Evangelists have not enlarged on these, or any other similar topics. They have contented themselves with telling their story concisely and coldly, with a bare simple recital of the facts, without attempting to work upon the passions, or excite the admiration of their readers.

In fact, it appears from this and a variety of other instances of the same nature, that neither fame nor reputation, nor any other worldly advantage, had the least influence upon their hearts. Their sole object was the advancement of truth, of morality, of religion, of the eternal welfare and salvation of mankind. For these great objects they

wrote, for theſe they lived, for theſe they ſuffered, and for theſe they died; on theſe their thoughts were entirely and immoveably fixed, and therefore their narratives juſtly claim the moſt implicit belief in every thing that relates to theſe great, and important, and intereſting ſubjects.

Another obſervation which this part of the Sacred Hiſtory ſuggeſts to us, is this; that no perſon ever yet appeared in the world to whom ſuch diſtinguiſhed marks of honor were paid from his birth to his death, as our bleſſed Lord. We are often reproached with the mean condition of our Redeemer. We are often told, that He, whom we have choſen for our Lord and Maſter, who is the object of our adoration, and on whom all our hopes are fixed, was the reputed ſon of a carpenter, lived in penury and diſtreſs, and at laſt ſuffered the ignominious death of the croſs. All this is true. But it is equally true, that this man of indigence and of ſorrow appeared through his whole life to be the peculiar favorite of Heaven; and to have been conſidered, not indeed by his infatuated countrymen, but by beings of a far ſuperior order, the moſt important perſonage that ever appeared on this earthly ſcene. At his birth, we are told, that the glory of the Lord ſhone round about certain ſhepherds that were then keeping watch over their flocks by night; and there was a multitude of the heavenly hoſt, praiſing God and ſaying, "Glory to God in the higheſt, and on earth peace, good-will towards men."*

Not long after this, a new ſtar or meteor appeared in the heavens on purpoſe to announce his birth, which accordingly (as we have juſt ſeen) attracted the notice of thoſe illuſtrious ſtrangers, who came from a diſtant country to pay their homage to the infant Jeſus; whom, notwithſtanding the humility of his condition and of his habitation, they hailed as king of the Jews. At his baptiſm, the heavens were opened to him, and he ſaw the ſpirit of God deſcending like a dove, and lighting upon him.† After his temptation, when he had vanquiſhed the prince of darkneſs, behold, angels came and miniſtered unto him.‡ At his transfiguration, his face did ſhine as the ſun, and his raiment was bright as the light,

* Luke ii. 14. † Matth. iii. 16. ‡ Matth. iv. 11.

and there appeared Moſes and Elias talking with him, and from the cloud which overſhadowed them, there came a voice, ſaying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleaſed; *hear ye him.*"* At his agony in the garden, there appeared an angel unto him, ſtrengthening him.† At his crucifixion, all nature ſeemed to be thrown into convulſions: the ſun was darkened; the veil of the temple was rent in twain, from the top to the bottom; the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; the graves were opened, and gave up their dead; and even the heathen centurion, and thoſe that were with him, were compelled to cry out, "Truly this was the ſon of God."‡ Before his aſcenſion, he ſaid to his diſciples, "All power is given to me in heaven and in earth; and while he yet bleſſed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven, and a cloud received him out of their ſight."§ There we are told he ſitteth at the right hand of God, making interceſſion for the ſinful race of man, till he comes a ſecond time in the glory of his Father, with all his holy angels, to judge the world. There has God "highly exalted him above all principalities and power, and might and dominion, and given him a name, which is above every name; that at the name of Jeſus, every knee ſhould bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue ſhould confeſs that Jeſus Chriſt is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."‖

When all theſe circumſtances are taken together, what a magnificent idea do they preſent to us of the humble Jeſus, and how does all earthly ſplendor fade and die away under this overbearing effulgence of celeſtial glory! We need not then be aſhamed either of the birth, the life, or the death of Chriſt, "for they are the power of God unto ſalvation." And if the great and the wiſe men, whoſe hiſtory we have been conſidering, were induced by the appearance of a new ſtar, to ſearch out, with no ſmall labor and fatigue, the infant Saviour of the world; if they, though philoſophers and deiſts (far different from the philoſophers and deiſts of the preſent day) diſdained not to proſtrate themſelves before

* Matth. xvii. 5. † Luke, xxii. 43. ‡ Matth. xxvii. 54.
§ Matth. xxviii. 18. Luke, xxiv, 51. ‖ Philip. ii. 9—11.

him, and preſent to him the richeſt and the choiceſt gifts they had to offer; well may we, when this child of the Moſt High is not only grown to maturity, but has lived, and died, and riſen again for us, and is now ſet down at the right hand of God (angels and principalities and powers being made ſubject to him) well may we not only pay our homage, but our adoration to the Son of God, and offer to him oblations far more precious than gold, frankincenſe and myrrh; namely, ourſelves, our ſouls and our bodies, "as a reaſonable, holy and lively ſacrifice unto him;" well may we join with that innumerable multitude in heaven, which is continually praiſing him and ſaying; "Bleſſing, and honor, and glory be unto him, that ſitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever."*

* Rev. v. 13.

LECTURE III.

MATTH. CHAP. iii.

THE ſubject of this lecture will be the third chapter of Saint Matthew, in which we have the hiſtory of a very extraordinary perſon called JOHN THE BAPTIST; to diſtinguiſh him from another John mentioned in the New Teſtament, who was our Saviour's beloved diſciple, and the author of the Goſpel that bears his name; whence he is called JOHN THE EVANGELIST.

As the character of John the Baptiſt is in many reſpects a very remarkable one, and his appearance bears a ſtrong teſtimony to the divine miſſion of Chriſt and the truth of his religion, I ſhall enter pretty much at large into the particulars of his hiſtory, as they are to be found not only in the Goſpel of St. Matthew, but in the other three Evangeliſts; collecting from each all the material circumſtances of his life, from the time of his firſt appearance in the wilderneſs to his murder by Herod.

St. Matthew's account of him is as follows:* In thoſe days came John the Baptiſt, preaching in the wilderneſs of Judea, and ſaying, *repent ye*, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was ſpoken of by the prophet Iſaiah, ſaying, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths ſtraight. And the ſame John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins, and his meat was locuſts and wild honey. And there went out to him Jeruſalem and all Judea, and all the regions round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan confeſſing their ſins."

Here then we have a perſon, who appears to have been ſent into the world, on purpoſe to be the precurſor of our

* Matth. iii, 1—6.

Lord, to prepare the way for him and his religion, here called the *kingdom of heaven*, and as the prophet expreſſes it, to *make his paths ſtraight*. This is a plain alluſion to the cuſtom that prevailed in eaſtern countries, of ſending meſſengers and pioneers to make the ways level and ſtraight before kings and princes and other great men, when they paſſed through the country with large retinues, and with great pomp and magnificence. They literally lowered mountains, they raiſed valleys, they cut down woods, they removed all obſtacles, they cleared away all roughneſſes and inequalities, and made every thing ſmooth and plain and commodious for the great perſonage whom they preceded.

In the ſame manner was John the Baptiſt in a ſpiritual ſenſe *to go before the Lord*, before the Saviour of the world, to prepare his way, to make his paths ſtraight, to remove out of the minds of men every thing that oppoſed itſelf to the admiſſion of divine truth, all prejudice, blindneſs, pride, obſtinacy, ſelf-conceit, vanity, and vain philoſophy; but above all, to ſubdue and regulate thoſe depraved affections, appetites, paſſions, and inveterate habits of wickedneſs, which are the grand obſtacles to converſion and the reception of the word of God.

His exhortation therefore was, "*Repent ye*;" renounce thoſe vices and abominations which at preſent blind your eyes and cloud your underſtandings, and then you will be able to ſee the truth and bear the light. This was the method which John took, the inſtrument he made uſe of to extirpate out of the minds of his hearers all impediments to the march of the Goſpel, or, as the prophetic language moſt ſublimely expreſſes it, "He * cried aloud to them, Prepare ye the way of the Lord make ſtraight the highway for our God. Let every valley be exalted, and every mountain and hill be made low; let the crooked be made ſtraight, and the rough places plain; and the glory of the Lord ſhall be revealed, and all fleſh ſhall ſee it."

What a magnificent preparation is this for the great founder of our religion! What an exalted idea muſt it give us of his dignity and importance, to have a forerunner and a har-

* Iſaiah, xl. 3—5.

bingèr ſuch as John to proclaim his approach to the world, and call upon all mankind to attend to him! It was a diſtinction peculiar and appropriate to him. Neither Moſes nor any of the prophets can boaſt this mark of honour. It was reſerved for the Son of God, the Meſſiah, the Redeemer of mankind, and was well ſuited to the tranſcendant dignity of his perſon, and the grandeur of his deſign.

The place which St. John choſe for the exerciſe of his miniſtry was the wilderneſs of Judea, where he ſeems to have lived conſtantly from his birth to the time of his preaching; for St. Luke informs us,* "that he was in the wilderneſs till the time of his ſhewing unto Iſrael." Hear it appears he lived with great auſterity. For he drank neither wine nor ſtrong drink; a rule frequently obſerved by the Jews, when they devoted themſelves to the ſtricter exerciſes of religion. And his meat was locuſts and wild honey: ſuch ſimple food as the deſert afforded to the loweſt of its inhabitants. For eating ſome ſorts of locuſts was not only permitted by the law of Moſes, but as travellers inform us, is common in the eaſt to this day. The clothing of the baptiſt was no leſs ſimple than his diet. His raiment, we are told, was of camel's hair with a leathern girdle about his loins; the ſame coarſe habit which the meaner people uſually wore, and which ſometimes even the rich aſſumed as a garbe of mourning. For this raiment of *camel's hair* was nothing elſe than that *ſack-cloth* which we ſo often read of in Scripture. And as almoſt every thing of moment was, in thoſe nations and thoſe times, expreſſed by viſible ſigns as well as by words, the prophets alſo were generally clothed in this dreſs, becauſe one principal branch of their office was to call upon men to *mourn* for their ſins. And particularly Elias or Elijah is deſcribed in the ſecond book of kings as a *hairy man*,† that is, a man clothed in hair-cloth or ſack-cloth (as John was) with a leathern girdle about his loins. Even in outward *appearance* therefore John was another Elias; but much more ſo as he was endued, according to the angel's prediction, with the *ſpirit* and *power* of Elias.‡ Both roſe up among the Jews in times of univerſal corruption; both were authorized to denounce ſpeedy vengeance from Heaven, unleſs they repented; both executed their commiſſion with the ſame intrepid

* Luke, i. 80. † 2 Kings, i. 8. ‡ Luke, i. 17.

zeal; both were perſecuted for it: yet nothing deterred either Elias from accuſing Ahab to his face, or John from rebuking Herod in the ſame undaunted manner.

But here an apparent difficulty occurs, and the ſacred writers are charged with making our Lord and St. John flatly contradict each other.

When the Jews ſent prieſts and Levites from Jeruſalem to aſk John who he was, and particularly whether he was *Elias*; his anſwer was, *I am not*:* But yet our Lord told the Jews that John *was* the Elias which was to come.† How is this contradiction to be reconciled? Without any kind of difficulty. The Jews had an expectation founded on a literal interpretation of the prophet Malachi,‡ that before the Meſſiah came, that very ſame Elias or Elijah, who lived and propheſied in the time of Ahab, would riſe from the dead and appear again upon earth. John therefore might very truly ſay that he was not *that* Elias. But yet as we have ſeen that he reſembled Elias in many ſtriking particulars; as the angel told Zacharias that he ſhould come in the *ſpirit* and *power* of Elias; and as he actually approved himſelf, in the turn and manner of his life, in his doctrine and his conduct, the very ſame man to the latter Jews which the other had been to the former, our Saviour might with equal truth aſſure his diſciples that John *was* that Elias, whoſe coming the prophet Malachi had in a *figurative* ſenſe foretold. This difficulty we ſee is ſo eaſily removed, that I ſhould not have thought it worth noticing in this place, had it not been very lately revived with much parade in one of thoſe coarſe and blaſphemous publications which have been diſperſed in this country with ſo much activity, in order to diſſeminate vulgar infidelity among the lower orders of people, but which are now ſinking faſt into oblivion and contempt. This is one ſpecimen of what they call their *arguments* againſt Chriſtianity, and from this ſpecimen you will judge of all the reſt. But to return.

The abſtemiouſneſs and rigour of the Baptiſt's life was calculated to produce very important effects. It was fitted

* John, i. 21. † Matth. xi. 14. ‡ Malachi, iv. 5.

to excite great attention and reverence in the minds of his hearers. It was well ſuited to the doctrine he was to preach, that of *repentance and contrition*; to the ſerioufneſs he wiſhed to inſpire, and to the terror which he was appointed to impreſs on impenitent offenders. And perhaps it was further deſigned to intimate the need there often is of harſh reſtraints in the *beginning* of virtue, as the eaſy familiarity of our Lord's manner and behaviour exhibits the delightful freedom which attends the *perfection* of it. At leaſt, placing theſe two characters in view of the world, ſo near to each other, muſt teach men this very inſtructive leſſon; that though ſeverity of conduct may in various caſes be both prudent and neceſſary, yet the mildeſt and cheerfuleſt goodneſs is the compleateſt; and they the moſt uſeful to religion, who are able to converſe among ſinners without riſquing their innocence, as diſcreet phyſicians do among the ſick without endangering their health.

It is remarkable however that whatever mortifications John practiſed himſelf, it does not appear that he preſcribed any thing to others beyond the ordinary duties of a good life. His diſciples indeed faſted often, and ſo did many of the Jews beſides; probably therefore the former as well as the latter by their own choice. His general injunction was only,* "bring forth fruits meet for repentance." When more particular directions were deſired, he commanded all ſorts of men to avoid more eſpecially the ſins, to which their condition moſt expoſed them. Thus when the† people aſked him (the common people of that hard-hearted nation) what ſhall we do? John anſwered, "He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none, and he that hath meat, let him do likewiſe." That is, let every one of you according to his abilities exerciſe thoſe duties of charity and kindneſs to his neighbor, which you are all of you but too apt to neglect. The publicans or farmers of the revenue came to him, and ſaid, "‡ Maſter, what ſhall we do?" And he ſaid, "Exact no more than that which is appointed you." Keep clear from that rapine and extortion of which you are ſo often guilty in the collection of the revenue. The‖ ſoldiers too demanded of him, "What ſhall we do?"

* Matth. iii. 8. † Luke, iii. 10. 11.
‡ Ibid. 12. 13. ‖ Ibid. iii. 14.

his anſwer was, "Do violence to no man, neither accuſe any falſely, and be contented with your wages." That is, abſtain from thoſe acts of injuſtice, violence, and oppreſſion, to which your profeſſion too often leads you. Lewd and debauched people alſo applied to him, to whom no doubt he gave advice ſuited to their caſe. And therefore what he taught was not cerimonial obſervances, but moral conduct on religious principle; and without this he pronounced (however diſguſting the doctrine muſt be to a proud and ſuperſtitious people) the higheſt outward privileges to be of no value at all. "Think *not," ſaid he to the Jews, "to ſay within yourſelves 'we have Abraham to our father, and are therefore ſure of God's favor, be our conduct what it may:' for I ſay unto you that God is able of theſe ſtones to raiſe up children unto Abraham;" is able to make the moſt ſtupid and ignorant of theſe heathens, whom you ſo utterly deſpiſe, converts to true religion and heirs of the promiſes.

Such were the doctrines which John preached to his diſciples, and the ſucceſs which attended him was equal to their magnitude and importance.

This was plainly foretold by the angel that announced his birth to his father Zacharias. "Many † of the children of Iſrael (ſaid he) ſhall he turn to the Lord their God. Which in fact he did. For the evangeliſts tell us that "there went out unto him into the wilderneſs Jeruſalem and all Judea, and all the region about Jordan, and were baptized of him."‡ The truth of this is amply confirmed by Joſephus, who informs us, that "multitudes flocked to him; for they were greatly delighted with his diſcourſes."‖

It might naturally be expected that ſuch extraordinary popularity and applauſe as this would fill him with conceit and vanity, and inſpire him with a moſt exalted opinion of his own abilities, and a ſovereign contempt for any rival teacher of religion. But ſo far from this, the moſt prominent feature of his character was an unexampled modeſty and humility. Though he had been ſtiled by Malachi the meſſenger of the Lord, and even Elias (the chief prophet

* Matth. iii. 9. † Luke i. 16. ‡ Matth. iii. 5, 6.
‖ Joſeph. Antiq. Jud. xviii. 2. Edit. Huds.

of the Jews next to Moſes) he never aſſumed any higher title than that very humble one given him by Iſaiah; *the voice of one crying in the wilderneſs.* Far from deſiring or attempting to fix the admiration of the multitude on his own perſon, he gave notice from his firſt appearance of *another* immediately to follow him, for whom he was unworthy to perform the moſt ſervile offices. He made a ſcruple, till expreſsly commanded, of baptizing one ſo infinitely purer than himſelf, as he knew the holy Jeſus to be. And when his diſciples complained that all men deſerted him to follow Chriſt (a moſt mortifying circumſtance, had worldly applauſe, or intereſt, or power, been his point) nothing could be more ingenuouſly ſelf-denying than his anſwer; "Ye yourſelves bear me witneſs, that I ſaid I am *not* the Chriſt, but am ſent before him. He that hath the bride, is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, which ſtandeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly. This my joy therefore is fulfilled. He muſt increaſe, but I muſt decreaſe: he that is of the earth is earthy: he that cometh from heaven is above all."*

Of ſuch unaffected and diſintereſted humility as this, where ſhall we find, except in Chriſt, another inſtance? Yet with this was by no means united what we are too apt to aſſociate with our idea of humility, *meanneſs and timidity of ſpirit;* on the contrary, the whole conduct of the Baptiſt was marked throughout with the moſt intrepid courage and magnanimity in the diſcharge of his duty.

Inſtead of paying any court either to the great men of his nation on the one hand, or to the multitude on the other, he reproved the former for their hypocriſy in the ſtrongeſt terms; "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"† and he required the latter to renounce every one of thoſe favorite ſins which they had long indulged, and were moſt unwilling to part with. But what is ſtill more, he reproved without fear and without reſerve the abandoned and ferocious Herod, for injuriouſly taking away Herodias his brother's wife, and afterwards inceſtuouſly marrying her, and for all the other evil that he

* John iii. 28. 29. † Matthew iii. 7.

had done. He well knew the ſavage and unrelenting temper of that ſanguinary tyrant; he knew that this boldneſs of expoſtulation would ſooner or later bring down upon him the whole weight of his reſentment. But knowing alſo that he was ſent into the world to preach repentance to all, and feeling it his duty to cry aloud and ſpare not, to ſpare not even the greateſt and moſt exalted of ſinners, he determined not to ſhrink from that duty, but to obey his conſcience, and take the conſequences.

Thoſe conſequences were exactly what he muſt have foreſeen. He was firſt ſhut up in priſon; and not long afterwards, as you all know, the life of this great and innocent man was wantonly ſacrificed in the midſt of conviviality and mirth to the raſh oath of a worthleſs and a mercileſs prince, to the licentious faſcinations of a young woman, and the implacable vengeance of an old one.

After this ſhort hiſtory of the doctrines, the life, and the death of this extraordinary man, I beg leave to offer in concluſion a few remarks upon it to your ſerious conſideration.

And in the firſt place, in the teſtimony of John the Baptiſt, we have an additional and powerful evidence to the truth and the divine authority of Chriſt and his religion.

If the account given of John in the Goſpels be true, the hiſtory given there of Jeſus muſt be equally ſo, for they are plainly parts of one and the ſame plan, and are ſo connected and interwoven with each other, that they muſt either ſtand or fall together.

Now that in the firſt place there did really exiſt ſuch a perſon as John the Baptiſt at the time ſpecified by the evangeliſts, there cannot be the ſmalleſt doubt; for he is mentioned by the Jewiſh hiſtorian Joſephus, and all the circumſtances he relates of him, as far as they go, perfectly correſpond with the deſcription given of him by the ſacred hiſtorians. He repreſents him as uſing the ceremony of baptiſm. He ſays that multitudes flocked to him, for they were greatly delighted with his diſcourſes, and ready to obſerve all his directions. He aſſerts that he was a good man;

and that he exhorted the Jews not to come to his baptism without first preparing themselves for it by the practice of virtue; that is, in the language of the Gospels, without repentance. He relates his being inhumanly murdered by Herod; and adds, that the Jews in general entertained so high an opinion of the innocence, virtue, and sanctity of John, as to be persuaded that the destruction of Herod's army, which happened not long after, was a divine judgment inflicted on him for his barbarity to so excellent a man.*

It appears then that St. John was a person, of whose virtue, integrity, and piety, we have the most ample testimony from an historian of unquestionable veracity, and we may therefore rely with perfect confidence on every thing he tells us. He was the very man foretold both by Isaiah and Malachi, as the forerunner of that divine personage, whom the Jews expected under the name of the Messiah. He declared that Jesus Christ was this divine person, and that he himself was sent into the world on purpose to prepare the way before him, by exhorting men to repentance and reformation of life. If then this *record* of John (as the evangelists call it) be true, the divine mission of Christ is at once established, because the Baptist expressly asserts that he was the Son of God, and that whoever believed in him should have everlasting life.† Now that this record is true, we have every reason in the world to believe, not only because a man so eminently distinguished for every moral virtue as St. John confessedly was, cannot be thought capable of publicly proclaiming a deliberate falsehood; but because had his character been of a totally different complexion, had he for instance been influenced only by views of interest ambition, vanity, popularity; this very falsehood must have completely counteracted and overset every project of this nature. For every thing he said of Jesus, instead of aggrandizing and exalting *himself*, tended to lower and to debase him in the eyes of all the world; he assured the multitude who followed him, that there was another person much more worthy to be followed; that there was one coming after him of far greater dignity and consequence than himself; one

* Joseph. Antiq. l. xviii. c. 6. s. 2. Ed. Huds.
† John iii. 36. i. 34.

whose shoes latchet he was not worthy to unloose;* one so infinitely superior to him in rank, authority, and wisdom, that he was not fit to perform for him even the most servile offices. He himself was only come as a humble messenger to announce the arrival of his Lord, and smooth the way before him. But the great personage to whom they were to direct their eyes, and in whom they were to centre all their hopes, was JESUS CHRIST. Is this now the language of a man who sought only for honor, emolument, or fame, or was actuated only by the fond ambition of being at the head of a sect? No one can think so. It is not very usual surely for men of *any* character, much less for men of the *best* character, to invent and to utter a string of falsehoods with the professed design of degrading themselves and exalting some other person. Yet this was the plain tendency and avowed object of John's declarations, and the effect was exactly what might be expected, and what he wished and intended, namely, that great numbers deserted him and followed Christ.†

But besides bearing this honest and disinterested testimony to Christ, the Baptist hazarded a measure which no impostor or enthusiast ever ventured upon, without being immediately detected and exposed. He ventured to deliver *two prophecies* concerning Christ; prophecies too which were to be completed, not at some distant period, when both he and his hearers might be in their graves, and the prophecy itself forgot, but within a very short space of time, when every one who heard the prediction might be a witness to its accomplishment or its failure. He foretold, that *Jesus should baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire*, and that *he should be offered up as a sacrifice for the sins of mankind.*‡ These were very singular things for a man to foretel at hazard and from conjecture, because nothing could be more remote from the ideas of a Jew, or more unlikely to happen in the common course of things. They were moreover of that peculiar nature, that it was utterly impossible for John and Jesus to concert the matter between themselves; for the completion of the prophecies did not depend solely on *them*, but required the concurrence of other agents, of the Holy Ghost in the first

* Mark, i. 7. Luke, iii. 16. † John, iii. 26, 30; iv. 1.
‡ Matth. iii. 11. John, i. 29.

instance, and of the Jews and the Roman governor in the other; and unless these had entered into a confederacy with the Baptist and with Christ, to fulfil what John foretold, it was not in the power of either to secure the completion of it. Yet both these prophecies were, we know, actually accomplished within a very few years after they were delivered; for our Lord suffered death upon the cross for the redemption of the world; and the Holy Ghost descended visibly upon the apostles in the semblance of fire on the day of Pentecost.*

It is evident then that the Baptist was not only a good man, but a true prophet; and for both reasons, his testimony in favor of Christ, that he was the Son of God, affords an incontestible proof that both he and his religion came from heaven.

2. The history of the Baptist affords a proof also of another point of no small importance. It gives a strong confirmation to that great evangelical doctrine, the doctrine of atonement; the expiation of our sins by the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross.

We are often told, that there was no need for this expiation. That repentance and reformation are fully sufficient to restore the most abandoned sinners to the favor of a just and merciful God, and to avert the punishment due to their offences.

But what does the great herald and forerunner of Christ say to this? He came professedly as *a preacher of repentance*. This was his peculiar office, the great object of his mission, the constant topic of his exhortations. "Repent ye, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance."† This was the unceasing language of "the voice crying in the wilderness."

If then repentance alone had sufficient efficacy for the expiation of sin, surely we should have heard of this from him who came on purpose to preach repentance. But what is the case? Does he tell us that repentance *alone* will take away the guilt of our transgressions, and justify us in the eyes of our Maker? Quite the contrary. Notwithstanding the great

* Acts, ii, 2. † Matth. iii, 2. 8.

ſtreſs he juſtly lays on the indiſpenſable neceſſity of repentance, yet he tells his followers at the ſame time, that it was to *Chriſt only*, and to his death, that they were to look for the pardon of their ſins. "Behold," ſays he, "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the ſins of the world!"* And again, "he that believeth on the Son hath everlaſting life; and he that believeth not the Son hath not life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."† Since then the expiation of ſin by the ſacrifice of Chriſt is a doctrine not only taught in the Goſpel itſelf, but enforced alſo by him who came only to prepare the way for it; it is evident, from the care taken to apprize the world of it even *before* Chriſtianity was promulgated, how important and eſſential a part this muſt be of that divine religion.

Laſtly, it will be of uſe to obſerve, what the particular method was which John made uſe of to *prepare* men for the reception and the belief of the Goſpel; for whatever means he applied to the attainment of that end, the ſame probably we ſhall find the moſt efficacious for a ſimilar purpoſe at this very day.

Now it is evident that the Baptiſt addreſſed himſelf, in the firſt inſtance, not to the *underſtanding*, but to the *heart*. He did not attempt to convince his hearers, but to reform them; he did not ſay to them, go and ſtudy the prophets, examine with care the pretenſions of him whom I announce, and weigh accurately all the evidences of his divine miſſion; he well knew how all this would end, in the then corrupt ſtate of their minds. His exhortation was therefore, "*Repent ye*, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." It was on this principle he reproved with ſo much ſeverity the phariſees and ſadduces who came to his baptiſm, whom one would think he ſhould rather have encouraged and commended, and received with open arms. "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth, therefore, fruits meet for repentance."‡ Till you have done this, till you have purified your hearts and abandoned your ſins, my baptiſm will be of no uſe to you, and all the reaſoning in the world will have no effect upon you. In perfect

* Luke, i. 29. † John, iii. 36. ‡ Matth. iii. 7, 8.

conformity to this, Josephus informs us, that John exhorted the Jews not to come to his baptism, without first preparing themselves for it *by the practice of virtue*, by a strict adherence to the rules of equity and justice in their dealings with one another, and by manifesting a sincere piety towards God.

This is the preparation he required; and thus it is that we also must prepare men for the reception of divine truth. We must *first* reform, and then convince them. It is not in general the want of evidence, but the want of virtue that makes men infidels; let them cease to be wicked, and they will soon cease to be unbelievers. "It is with the heart," says St. Paul (not with the head) "that man believeth unto righteousness."* Correct the heart, and all will go right. Unless the soil is good, all the seed you cast upon it will be wasted in vain. In the parable of the sower we find, that the only seed which came to perfection was that which fell on *good ground*, on an honest and a good heart. This is the first and most essential requisite to belief. Unbelievers complain of the mysteries of revelation; but we have the highest authority for saying, that *in general* the only mystery which prevents them from receiving it, is the mystery of iniquity.

We hear, indeed, a great deal of the good nature, the benevolence, the generosity, the humanity, the honor, and the other innumerable good qualities of those that reject the Gospel; and they may possibly possess some ostentatious and popular virtues, and may keep clear from flagrant and disreputable vices. But whether some gross depravity, some inveterate prejudice, or some leaven of vanity and self-conceit, does not commonly lurk in their hearts, and influence both their opinions and their practices, they who have an extensive acquaintance with the writings and the conduct of that class of men will find no difficulty in deciding. If however this was the decision of man only, the justness of it might be controverted, and the competency of the judge denied. It might be said, that it is unbecoming and presumptuous in any human being to pass severe censures on large bodies of men; and that without being able to look into the heart of man, it is impossible to form a right judgment of his moral charac-

* Rom. x. 10.

ter. This we do not deny. But if he who actually *has* that power of looking into the heart of man, if he who is perfectly well acquainted with human nature, and all the various characters of men; if *he* has declared that *men love darkneſs rather than light, becauſe their deeds are evil*,* who will controvert the truth of that deciſion? On this authority then we may ſecurely rely, and may reſt aſſured, that whatever pretences may be ſet up for rejecting revelation, the grand obſtacles to it are, indolence, indifference, vice, paſſion, prejudice, ſelf-conceit, pride, vanity, love of ſingularity, a diſdain to think with the vulgar, and an ambition to be conſidered as ſuperior to the reſt of mankind in genius, penetration, and diſcernment. It is by removing theſe impediments in the firſt place that we muſt prepare men, as St. John did, for embracing the religion of Chriſt. Theſe (to make uſe of prophetic language) are the *mountains* that muſt be made low; theſe the *crooked paths* that muſt be made ſtraight; theſe the *rough places* that muſt be made plain. Then all difficulties will be removed, and there will be A HIGH WAY FOR OUR GOD. Then there will be a ſmooth and eaſy approach for the Goſpel to the underſtanding, as well as to the heart; there will be nothing to oppoſe its conqueſt over the ſoul. THE GLORY OF THE LORD SHALL FULLY BE REVEALED, AND ALL FLESH SHALL SEE IT.†

* John, iii. 19. † Iſaiah, xl. 5.

LECTURE IV.

MATTHEW iv.—former part.

THE fourth chapter of St. Matthew, at which we are now arrived, opens with an account of that moſt ſingular and extraordinary tranſaction, THE TEMPTATION OF CHRIST IN THE WILDERNESS. The detail of it is as follows;

"Then was Jeſus led up of the ſpirit into the wilderneſs to be tempted of the devil: and when he had faſted forty days and forty nights he was afterwards an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he ſaid, if thou be the Son of God, command that theſe ſtones be made bread. But he anſwered and ſaid, it is written man ſhall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and ſetteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and ſaith unto him, if thou be the Son of God, caſt thyſelf down; for it is written, he ſhall give his angels charge, concerning thee, and in their hands they ſhall bear thee up, leſt at any time thou daſh thy foot againſt a ſtone. Jeſus ſaid unto him, thou ſhalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Again the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and ſheweth him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, and ſaith unto him, all theſe things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worſhip me. Then ſaid Jeſus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan, for it is written, thou ſhalt worſhip the Lord thy God, and him only ſhalt thou ſerve. Then the devil leaveth him, and behold angels came and miniſtered unto him."*

Such is the hiſtory given by the Evangeliſts of our Lord's temptation, which has been a ſubject of much diſcuſſion

* Matth. iv. 1—11.

among learned men. It is well known in particular that ſeveral ancient commentators as well as many able and pious men of our own times, have thought that this temptation was not a real tranſaction, but only a viſion or prophetic trance, ſimilar to that which Ezekiel deſcribes in the 8th chapter of his prophecy, and to that which befel St. Peter when he ſaw a veſſel deſcending unto him from heaven, and let down to the earth.* And it muſt be acknowledged that this opinion is ſupported by many ſpecious arguments, and ſeems to remove ſome conſiderable difficulties. But upon the whole there are I think ſtronger reaſons for adhering to the literal interpretation, than for recurring to a viſionary repreſentation.

For in the firſt place, it is a rule admitted and eſtabliſhed by the beſt and moſt judicious interpreters, that in explaining the ſacred writings we ought never, without the moſt apparent and moſt indiſpenſable neceſſity, allow ourſelves the liberty of departing from the plain, obvious, and literal meaning of the words. Now, I conceive that no ſuch neceſſity can be alledged in the preſent inſtance. It is true, that there are in this narrative many difficulties, and many extraordinary, ſurpriſing, and miraculous incidents. But the whole hiſtory of our Saviour is wonderful and miraculous from beginning to end; and if whenever we meet with a difficulty or a miracle, we may have recourſe to figure, metophor, or viſion, we ſhall ſoon reduce a great part of the ſacred writings to nothing elſe. Beſides, theſe difficulties will ſeveral of them admit of a fair ſolution; and where they do not, as they affect no article of faith or practice, they muſt be left among thoſe inſcrutable myſteries which it is natural to expect in a revelation from heaven. This we muſt after all be content to do, even if we adopt the idea of viſion; for aven *that* does not remove *every* difficulty, and it creates ſome that do not attach to the literal interpretation.

2. In the next place, I cannot find in any part of this narrative of the temptation the ſlighteſt or moſt diſtant intimation that it is nothing more than a viſion. The very firſt words with which it commences ſeem to imply the di-

* Acts x. 10—16.

rect contrary. "Then was Jeſus led up of the ſpirit into the wilderneſs to be tempted of the devil." Does not this ſay in the moſt expreſs terms that our Lord was led, not in a dream, or trance, or viſion, but was actually and literally led by the ſpirit into the wilderneſs of Judea? There is, I know, an interpretation which explains away this obvious meaning. But that interpretation reſts ſolely on the doubtful ſignification of a ſingle Greek particle, which is ſurely much too ſlender a ground to juſtify a departure from the plain and literal ſenſe of the paſſage. Certain it is, that if any one had meant to deſcribe a real tranſaction, he could not have ſelected any expreſſions better adapted to that purpoſe than thoſe actually made uſe of by the Evangeliſt; and I believe no one at his firſt reading of our Lord's temptation ever entertained the ſlighteſt idea of its being a viſionary repreſentation.

3. There is an obſervation which has been made, and which has great weight in this queſtion. It is this: All the prophets of the Old Teſtament, except Moſes, ſaw viſions, and dreamed dreams, and the prophets of the New did the ſame. St. Peter had a viſion, St. John ſaw viſions, St. Paul had viſions and dreams: but Chriſt himſelf neither ſaw viſions nor dreamed dreams. He had an intimate and immediate communication with the Father; and he, and no one elſe in his days, had *ſeen* the Father. The caſe was the ſame with Moſes; he ſaw God face to face. "If there be a prophet among you, ſays God to Aaron, and Miriam, I the Lord will make myſelf known to him in a viſion, and will ſpeak unto him in a dream. My ſervant Moſes is *not* ſo, who is faithful in all my houſe; with him will I ſpeak mouth to mouth, even apparently and not in dark ſpeeches; and the ſimilitude of the Lord ſhall he behold."* Now Moſes we all know was a type of Chriſt; and the reſemblance holds between them in this inſtance as well as in many others. They neither of them had viſions or dreams, but had both an immediate communication with God. They both "ſaw God face to face."† This was a diſtinction and a mark of dignity peculiar to thoſe two only, to the great legiſlator of the Jews, and the great legiſlator of the Chriſtians. It is

* Numb. xii. 6—8. † Exod. xxxiii. 11.

therefore inconſiſtent with this high priviledge, this mark of ſuperior eminence, to ſuppoſe that our Lord was tempted in a viſion, when we ſee no other inſtance of a viſion in the whole courſe of his miniſtry.

4. There is ſtill another conſideration which militates ſtrongly againſt the ſuppoſition of a viſionary temptation. It was in itſelf extremely probable that there ſhould be a real and perſonal conflict between Chriſt and Satan, when the former was entering upon his public miniſtry.

It is well known that the great chief of the fallen angels, who is diſcribed in ſcripture under the various names of Satan, Beelzebub, the Devil, and the Prince of the devils, has ever been an irreconcileable enemy of the human race, and has been conſtantly giving the moſt decided and moſt fatal proofs of this enmity from the beginning of the world to this hour. His hoſtility began with the very firſt creation of man upon earth, when he no ſooner diſcovered our firſt parents in that ſtate of innocence and happineſs in which the gracious hand of the Almighty had juſt placed them, than with a malignity truly diabolical, he reſolved if poſſible to deſtroy all this fair ſcene of virtuous bliſs, and to plunge them into the gulph of ſin and miſery. For this purpoſe he exerted all his art and ſubtilty and powers of perſuaſion; and how well he ſucceeded we all know and feel. From that hour he eſtabliſhed and exerciſed an aſtoniſhing dominion over the minds of men, leading them into ſuch acts of folly, ſtupidity, and wickedneſs, as can on no other principle be accounted for. At the time of our Saviour's appearance his tyranny ſeems to have arrived at its utmoſt height, and to have extended to the bodies as well as to the ſouls of men, of both which he ſometimes took abſolute *poſſeſſion*: as we ſee in the hiſtory of thoſe unhappy perſons mentioned in ſcripture whom we call demoniacs and who were truly ſaid to be *poſſeſſed* by the devil. It was therefore extremely natural to ſuppoſe, that when he found there was a great and extraordinary perſonage who had juſt made his appearance in the world, who was ſaid to be the Son of God, the promiſed Saviour of mankind, that ſeed of the woman who was to bruiſe the ſerpent's head; it was natural that he ſhould be exceedingly alarmed

at theſe tidings, that he ſhould tremble for his dominion; that he ſhould firſt endeavour to aſcertain the fact, whether this was really the Chriſt or not; and if it turned out to be ſo, that he ſhould exert his utmoſt efforts to ſubdue this formidable enemy, or at leaſt to ſeduce him from his allegiance to God, and divert him from his benevolent purpoſe towards man. He had ruined the firſt Adam, and he might therefore flatter himſelf with the hope of being equally ſucceſsful with the ſecond Adam. He had entailed a mortal diſeaſe on the human race; and to prevent their recovery from that diſeaſe, and their reſtoration to virtue and to happineſs, would be a triumph indeed, a conqueſt worthy of the prince of the devils.

On the other hand it was equally probable that our bleſſed Lord would think it a meaſure highly proper to begin his miniſtry with ſhewing a decided ſuperiority over the great adverſary of man, whoſe empire he was going to aboliſh; with manifeſting to mankind that the great Captain of their ſalvation was able to accompliſh the important work he had undertaken, and with ſetting an example of virtuous firmneſs to his followers, which might encourage them to reſiſt the moſt powerful temptations that the prince of darkneſs could throw in their way.

Theſe conſiderations, in addition to many others, afford a ſtrong ground for believing that the temptation of Chriſt in the wilderneſs was, as the hiſtory itſelf plainly intimates, a real tranſaction, a perſonal conteſt between the great enemy and the great Redeemer of the human race; and in this point of view therefore I ſhall proceed to conſider ſome of the moſt remarkable circumſtances attending it, and the practical uſes reſulting from it.*

* It is an ingenious obſervation of a learned friend of mine, that the temptation of Chriſt in the wilderneſs bears an evident analogy to the trial of Adam in Paradiſe, and elucidates the nature of that trial in which the tempter prevailed and man fell. The *ſecond* Adam, who undertook the cauſe of fallen men, was ſubjected to temptation by the ſame apoſtate ſpirit. Herein the tempter failed, and the ſecond Adam in conſequence became the reſtorer of the fallen race of the firſt. St. Paul in more places than one, points out the reſemblance between the firſt Adam and the ſecond, and the temptation in the wilderneſs exhibits a moſt intereſting tranſaction, where the ſecond Adam was actually placed in a ſituation

We are told in the first place that "Jesus was led up of the spirit into the wilderness," that is, not by the evil spirit but by the spirit of God, by the suggestions and by the impulse of the Holy Ghost, of whose divine influences he was then full.—For the time when this happened was immediately after his baptism, which is related in the conclusion of the preceding chapter. We are there informed that Jesus when he was baptized went up straightway out of the water, and lo the heavens were opened, and he saw the spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him. And lo a voice from heaven saying, This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.* *Then* (it immediately follows) was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.—In that moment of exaltation, when he was acknowledged by a voice from heaven to be the Son of God, and when the Spirit of God had taken full possession of his soul, then it was that Jesus went forth under the guidance of that spirit in full confidence of his divine power into the wilderness, to incounter the prince of this world. A plain proof that this contest was a preconcerted design, a measure approved by heaven, and subservient to the grand design, in which our Saviour was engaged of rescuing mankind from the dominion of Satan.

The place into which our blessed Lord was thus led was *the wilderness*, probably the *great wilderness* near the river Jordan, in which Jesus was baptized, and soon afterwards tempted. This wilderness is thus discribed by a traveller of great credit and varacity, who had himself seen it. "In a few hours (says this writer) we arrived at the mountainous desert, in which our Saviour was led by the spirit to be tempted by the devil. It is a most miserable dry barren place, consisting of high rocky mountains, so torn and disordered as if the earth had suffered some great convulsion, in which its very bowels had been turned outward. On the left hand, looking down into a deep valley, as we passed along we saw

very similar to that of the first. The secrets of the Most High are unfathomable to short-sighted mortals; but it would appear from what may be humbly learnt and inferred from this transaction, that our blessed Lord's temptation by Satan was a necessary part in the divine economy towards accomplishing the redemption of mankind.

* Matth. iii, 16, 17.

ſome ruins of ſmall cells and cottages, which we were told were formerly the habitations of hermits retiring hither for penance and mortification; and certainly there could not be found in the whole earth a more comfortleſs and abandoned place for that purpoſe. On deſcending from theſe hills of deſolation into the plain, we ſoon came to the foot of Mount Quarrantania, which they ſay is the mountain from whence the devil tempted our Saviour with that viſionary ſcene of all the kingdoms and glories of this world. It is, as St. Matthew calls it, *an exceeding high mountain*, and in its aſcent difficult and dangerous. It has a ſmall chappel at the top, and another about half way up, on a prominent part of a rock. Near this latter are ſeveral caves and holes in the ſides of the mountain, made uſe of anciently by hermits, and by ſome at this day for places to keep their Lent in, in imitation of that of our bleſſed Saviour."*

This was a theatre perfectly proper for the prince of the fallen angels to act his part upon, and perfectly well ſuited to his dark malignant purpoſes.

Here then after our Saviour (as Moſes and Elijah had done before him) had endured a long abſtinence from food, the devil abruptly and artfully aſſailed him with a temptation well calculated to produce a powerful effect on a perſon faint and worn out with faſting. "If thou be the Son of God, command that theſe ſtones be made bread." But our Saviour repelled this inſidious advice, by quoting the words of Moſes to the Iſraelites in the wilderneſs, "Man ſhall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."† That is, he that brought me into this wilderneſs, and ſubjected me to theſe trials, can ſupport me under the preſſure of hunger, by a variety of means, beſides the common one of bread, juſt as he fed the Iſraelites in the wilderneſs with manna, with food from heaven. I will therefore rather chooſe to rely on his gracious providence for my ſupport in this exigency, than work a miracle myſelf for the ſupply of my wants.

This anſwer was perfectly conformable to the principle on which our Lord acted throughout the whole of his miniſtry.

* Maundrell. † Deut. viii. 3. Matth. iv. 4.

All his miracles were wrought for the benefit of others, not one for his own gratification. Though he endured hunger and thirſt, and indigence and fatigue, and all the other evils of a laborious and an itinerant life, yet he never once relieved himſelf from any of theſe inconveniences, or procured a ſingle comfort to himſelf by the working of miracles. Theſe were all appropriated to the grand object of proving the truth of his religion and the reality of his divine miſſion, and he never applied them to any other purpoſe. And in this, as in all other caſes, he acted with the moſt perfect wiſdom; for had he always or often delivered himſelf from the ſufferings and the diſtreſſes incident to human nature by the exertions of his miraculous powers, the benefit of his example would have been in a great meaſure loſt to mankind, and it would have been of little uſe to us, *that he was in all things tempted like as we are**, becauſe he would have been ſupported and ſuccoured as *we* cannot expect to be.

Having thus failed to work upon one of the ſtrongeſt of the ſenſual appetites, *hunger*, the tempter's next application was to a different paſſion, but one which, in ſome minds, is extremely powerful, and often leads to great folly and guilt, I mean vanity and ſelf-importance. "He taketh our Lord into the holy city, and ſetteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and ſaith unto him, if thou be the Son of God caſt thyſelf down; for it is written, he ſhall give his angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they will bear thee up, leſt at any time thou daſh thy foot againſt a ſtone†."

The place where our Saviour now ſtood was on a pinnacle, or rather on a wing of the magnificent temple of Jeruſalem, from whence there was a view of the vaſt concourſe of people who were worſhipping in the area below. In this ſituation the ſeducer flattered himſelf that our Saviour, indignant at the doubts which he artfully expreſſed of his being the Son of God, would be eager to give him and all the multitude that beheld them a moſt convincing proof that he was ſo, by caſting himſelf from the height on which he ſtood into the court below, accompanied all the way as he deſcended by an illuſtrious hoſt of angels, anxiouſly guarding his per-

* Heb. iv. 15. † Matth. iv. 5, 6.

ſon from all danger, and plainly manifeſting by their ſolicitude to protect and to preſerve him, that they had a moſt invaluable treaſure committed to their care, and that he was in truth the beloved Son of God, the peculiar favorite of heaven.

To a vain-glorious mind nothing could have been more gratifying, more flattering, than ſuch a propoſal as this; more eſpecially as ſo magnificent a ſpectacle in the ſight of all the Jews would probably have induced them to receive him as their Meſſiah, whom it is well known they expected to deſcend viſibly from heaven in ſome ſuch triumphant manner as this.

But on the humble mind of Jeſus all this had no effect.—To him who never affected parade or ſhew, who never courted admiration or applauſe, who kept himſelf as quiet and as retired as the nature of his miſſion would allow, and frequently withdrew from the multitudes that flocked around him, to deſerts and to mountains, to him this temptation carried no force; his anſwer was, "Thou ſhalt not tempt the Lord thy God;" thou ſhalt not ruſh into unneceſſary danger in order to *tempt* God, in order to *try* whether he will interpoſe to ſave thee in a miraculous manner; much leſs ought this to be done as now propoſed for the purpoſes of vanity and oſtentation.

The next temptation is thus deſcribed by St. Matthew:

"Again the devil taketh him up into an *exceeding high mountain*, and ſheweth him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and ſaith unto him, all theſe things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worſhip me."*

It has been thought an inſuperable difficulty to conceive how Satan could from any mountain however elevated, ſhew to our Saviour all the kingdoms of the earth, and the glory of them. And even they who defend the literal ſenſe of the tranſaction in general, yet have recourſe to a viſionary repreſentation in this particular inſtance. But there ſeems to me no neceſſity for calling in the help of a viſion

* Matth. iv. 8, 9.

even here. The Evangeliſt deſcribes the mountain on which Chriſt was placed as an *exceeding high one;* and the traveller* to whom I before referred, deſcribes it in the ſame terms.—From thence of courſe there muſt have been a very extenſive view; and accordingly another writer, the Abbè Mariti, in his travels through Cyprus, &c. ſpeaking of this mountain, ſays, "Here we enjoyed the moſt beautiful proſpect imaginable. This part of the mountain overlooks the mountains of Arabia, the country of Gilead, the country of the Ammonites, the plains of Moab, the plain of Jericho, the river Jordan, and the whole extent of the Dead ſea." Theſe various domains the tempter might ſhew to our Lord diſtinctly, and might alſo at the ſame time *point out* (for ſo the original word *deiknumi* ſometimes ſignifies) and direct our Lord's eye towards ſeveral other regions that lay beyond them, which might comprehend all the principal kingdoms of the eaſtern world. And he might then properly enough ſay, "all theſe kingdoms which you now ſee, or towards which I now point, will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worſhip me." This explanation appears to me an eaſy and a natural one. But if others think differently, it is ſufficient to ſay, that this particular incident is not more extraordinary than almoſt every other part of this very ſingular tranſaction; throughout the whole of which the devil appears to have been permitted to exerciſe a power far beyond what naturally belonged to him.

But whatever we may decide on this point, the nature and magnitude of the temptation are evident. It is no leſs than an offer of kingdoms, with all their glory; all the honors, power, rank, wealth, grandeur, and magnificence, that this world has to give. But all theſe put together could not for one moment ſhake the firm mind of our divine Maſter, or ſeduce him from the duty he owed to God. He rejected with abhorrence the impious propoſition made to him, and anſwered with a proper indignation, in the words of ſcripture, "Get thee hence, Satan; for it is written, thou ſhalt worſhip the Lord thy God, and him only ſhalt thou ſerve.†" Upon this we are told that the devil left him, and that angels came and miniſtered unto him.

* Maundrell. † Matth. iv. 10, 11.

Thus ended this memorable ſcene of Chriſt's temptation in the wilderneſs. The reaſons of it reſpecting our Lord have been already explained; the inſtructions it furniſhes to ourſelves are principally theſe:

1. It teaches us, that even the beſt of men may ſometimes be permitted to fall into great temptations, for we ſee that our bleſſed Lord himſelf was expoſed to the ſevereſt. They are not therefore to be conſidered as marks of God's diſpleaſure or deſertion of us, but only as trials of our virtue; as means of proving (as Moſes tells the Iſraelites) what is in our hearts, whether we will keep God's commandments or no;* as opportunities graciouſly afforded us to demonſtrate our ſincerity, our fortitude, our integrity, our unſhaken allegiance and fidelity to the great Ruler of the world.

2. Whenever we are thus brought into temptation, we have every reaſon to hope for the divine aſſiſtance to extricate us from danger. We have the example of our bleſſed Lord to encourage us. We ſee the great Captain of our ſalvation aſſaulted by all the art and all the power of Satan, and yet riſing ſuperior to all his efforts. We ſee him going before us in the paths of virtue and of glory, and calling upon us to follow him. Though he was led by the ſpirit of God himſelf into the wilderneſs in order to be tempted, yet the ſame divine ſpirit accompanied and ſupported him throughout the whole of his bitter conflict, and enabled him to triumph over his infernal adverſary. To the ſame heavenly ſpirit *we* alſo may look for deliverance. If we implore God in fervent prayer to ſend him to us, he will aſſuredly grant our petition. He will not ſuffer us to be tempted above what we are able, but will with the temptation alſo *make* a way to eſcape (when we ourſelves cannot *find* one) that we may be able to bear it.†

3. We may learn from the conduct of our Lord under this great trial, that when temptations aſſail us we are not to parley or to reaſon with them, to heſitate and deliberate whether we ſhall give way to them or not, but muſt at once repel them with firmneſs and with vigour, and oppoſe to

* Deut. viii. 2. † 1 Cor. x. 13.

the dictates of our paſſions the plain and poſitive commands of God in his holy word. We muſt ſay reſolutely to the tempter, as our Lord did, "Get thee hence, Satan,"* and he will inſtantly flee from *us*, as he did from *him*.

4. It is a moſt ſolid conſolation to us under ſuch conteſts as theſe, that if we honeſtly exert our utmoſt efforts to vanquiſh the enemies of our ſalvation, moſt humbly and devoutly ſoliciting at the ſame time the influences of divine grace to aid our weak endeavours, the unavoidable errors, and imperfections of our nature will not be aſcribed to us, nor will God be extreme to mark every thing that is done amiſs; for we ſhall not be judged by one who has no *feeling* of our infirmities, but by one who knows and who pities them, who was himſelf in all things tempted like as we are, yet without ſin†, and who will therefore make all due allowances for our involuntary failings, though none for our wilful tranſgreſſions.

5. And laſtly, in the various allurements preſented to our Lord, we ſee but too faithful a picture of thoſe we are to expect ourſelves in our progreſs through life. Our Lord's temptations were, as we have ſeen, ſenſual gratifications, incitements to vanity and oſtentation, and the charms of wealth, power, rank, and ſplendour. All theſe will in the different ſtages of our exiſtence ſucceſſively riſe up to ſeduce us, to oppoſe our progreſs to heaven, and bring us into captivity to ſin and miſery. Pleaſure, intereſt, buſineſs, honour, glory, fame, all the follies and all the corruptions of the world, will each in their turn aſſault our feeble nature; and through theſe we muſt manfully fight our way to the great end we have in view. But the difficulty and the pain of this conteſt will be conſiderably leſſened by a reſolute and vigorous exertion of our powers and our reſources at our firſt ſetting out in life. It was immediately after his baptiſm, and at the very beginning of his miniſtry, that our Lord was expoſed to all the power and all the artifices of the devil, and completely triumphing over both, effectually ſecured himſelf from all future attempts of that implacable enemy. In the ſame manner it is on our firſt ſet-

* Matth. iv. 10. † Heb. iv. 15.

ting out in life, that we are to look for the moſt violent aſſaults from our paſſions within, and from the world and the prince of it without. And if we ſtrenuouſly reſiſt thoſe enemies of our ſalvation that preſent themſelves to us at that moſt critical and dangerous period, all the reſt that follow in our maturer age will be an eaſy conqueſt. On him who in the beginning of life has preſerved himſelf unſpotted from the world, all its ſubſequent attractions and allurements, all its magnificence, wealth, and ſplendour, will make little or no impreſſion. A mind that has been long habituated to diſcipline and ſelf-government amidſt far more powerful temptations, will have nothing to apprehend from ſuch aſſailants as theſe. But after all, our great ſecurity is aſſiſtance from above, which will never be denied to thoſe who fervently apply for it. And with the power of divine grace to ſupport us, with the example of our Lord in the wilderneſs to animate us, and an eternity of happineſs to reward us, what is there that can ſhake our conſtancy or corrupt our fidelity?

Set yourſelves then without delay to acquire an early habit of ſtrict ſelf-government, and an early intercourſe with your heavenly Protector and Comforter. Let it be your firſt care to eſtabliſh the ſovereignty of reaſon and the empire of grace over your ſoul, and you will ſoon find it no difficulty to repel the moſt powerful temptations. "Watch ye, ſtand faſt in the faith; quit yourſelves like men; be ſtrong,"* be reſolute, be patient; look frequently up to the prize that is ſet before you, leſt you be weary and faint in your minds. Conſider that every pleaſure you ſacrifice to your duty here, will be placed to your credit and encreaſe your happineſs hereafter. The conflict with your paſſions will grow leſs irkſome every day. A few years (with ſome of you perhaps a *very* few) will put an entire end to it; and you will then, to your unſpeakable comfort, be enabled to cry out with St. Paul, "I have fought a good fight, I have finiſhed my courſe, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteouſneſs, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, ſhall give me in that day."†

* 1 Cor. xvi. 13. † 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

LECTURE V.

MATTH. iv. Latter Part.

THE former part of the fourth chapter of St. Matthew, which contains the hiſtory of our Saviour's temptation, having been explained to you in the preceding Lecture, I ſhall now proceed to the latter part of the chapter, in which an account is given of the firſt opening of our bleſſed Lord's miniſtry, by his preaching, by his chuſing a few companions to attend him, and by his beginning to work miracles; all which things are ſtated very briefly, without any attempt to expatiate on the importance and magnitude of the ſubject, which was nevertheleſs the nobleſt and moſt intereſting that is to be found in hiſtory; an enterprize the moſt ſtupendous and aſtoniſhing that ever before entered into the mind of man, nothing leſs than the converſion of a whole world from wickedneſs and idolatry to virtue and true religion.

On this vaſt undertaking our Lord now entered; and we are informed by St. Matthew, in the 17th verſe of this chapter, in what *manner* he firſt announced himſelf and his religion to the world. His firſt addreſs to the people was ſimilar to that of the Baptiſt, *Repent* ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. The very firſt qualification he required of thoſe who aſpired to be his diſciples was *repentance*, a ſincere contrition for all paſt offences, and a reſolution to renounce in future every ſpecies of ſin; for ſin, he well knew, would be the grand obſtacle to the reception of his Goſpel.

What a noble idea does this preſent to us of the dignity and ſanctity of our divine religion! It cannot even be *approached* by the unhallowed and the profane. Before they can be admitted even into the outward courts of its ſanctu-

ary, they muſt leave their corrupt appetite and their ſinful practices behind them. "Put off thy ſhoes from off thy "feet," ſaid God to Moſes from the burning buſh, "for the "place whereon thou ſtandeſt is *holy ground.*"* Put off all thy vicious habits, ſays Chriſt to every one that aſpires to be his diſciple, for the religion thou art to embrace is a holy religion, and the God thou art to ſerve is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot even *look* upon iniquity. In ſome of the ancient ſects of philoſophy, before any one could be admitted into their ſchools, or initiated in their myſteries, he was obliged to undergo a certain courſe of preparation, a certain term of trial and probation, which however conſiſted of little more than a few ſuperſtitious ceremonies, or ſome acts of external diſcipline and purification. But the preparation for receiving the Chriſtian religion is *the preparation of the heart.* The diſcipline required for a participation of its privileges, is the mortification of ſin, the ſacrifice of every guilty propenſity and deſire.

This ſacrifice however the great founder of our religion did not require for nothing. He promiſed his followers a recompence infinitely beyond the indulgences they were to renounce; he promiſed them a place in his KINGDOM, a kingdom of which he was the ſovereign; a kingdom of righteouſneſs here, and of glory hereafter. *Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*†.

He then proceeds to ſelect and aſſociate to himſelf a certain number of perſons, who were to be his aſſiſtants and coadjutors in the eſtabliſhment and the adminiſtration of his heavenly kingdom.

And here it was natural to expect, that in making this choice he ſhould look to men of influence, authority, and weight; that being himſelf deſtitute of all the advantages of rank, power, wealth, and learning, he ſhould endeavor to compenſate for thoſe defects in his own perſon by the contrary qualities of his aſſociates, by connecting himſelf with ſome of the moſt powerful, moſt opulent, moſt learned, and moſt eloquent men of his time.

* Exod iii. 5. † Matth. iv. 17.

And this moſt undoubtedly would have been his mode of proceeding, had his object been to eſtabliſh his religion by mere *human* means, by influence or by force, by the charms of eloquence, by the powers of reaſon, by the example, by the authority, by the faſhion of the great. But theſe were not the inſtruments which Chriſt meant to make uſe of. He meant to ſhow that he was *above* them all; that he had far other reſources, far different auxiliaries, to call in to his ſupport, in compariſon of which all the wealth and magnificence, and power and wiſdom of the world, were trivial and contemptible things. We find therefore that not the wiſe, not the mighty, not the noble were called* to co-operate with him; but men of the meaneſt birth, of the loweſt occupations, of the humbleſt talents, and moſt uncultivated minds. "As he was walking by the ſea of Galilee, St. Matthew tells us, he ſaw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, caſting a net into the ſea, for they were fiſhers. And he ſaith unto them, follow me, and I will make you fiſhers of *men;* and they ſtraightway left their nets (that is in fact all their ſubſiſtence, all the little property they had in the world) and followed him. And going from thence he ſaw other two brethren, James the ſon of Zebedee and John his brother, in a ſhip with Zebedee their father mending their nets; and he called them, and they immediately left the ſhip, and their father, and followed him†." Theſe were the men whom he ſelected for his companions and aſſiſtants. Theſe fiſhermen of Galilee were to be, under him, the inſtruments of over-throwing the ſtupendous and magnificent ſyſtem of paganiſm and idolatry throughout the world, and producing the greateſt change, the moſt general and moſt important revolution in principles, in morals, and in religion, that ever took place on this globe. For this aſtoniſhing work, theſe ſimple, illiterate, humble men, were ſingled out by our Lord. He choſe, as the apoſtle expreſſes it, "the fooliſh things of the world to confound the wiſe, and the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty‡; that his religion might not be eſtabliſhed by the enticing words of man's wiſdom, but by demonſtration

* 1 Cor. i. 26. † Matth. iv. 18—22. ‡ 1 Cor. i. 27.

of the ſpirit and of power; that our faith ſhould not ſtand in the wiſdom of men, but in the power of God *."

Such were the aſſociates choſen by him, who was the delegate of heaven, and whoſe help was from above. We may expect therefore that an impoſtor, who meant to rely on *human* means for ſucceſs, would take a directly *contrary* courſe. And this we find in fact to be the caſe. Who were the companions and aſſiſtants ſelected by the grand impoſtor Mahomet? They were men of the moſt weight and authority, and rank and influence, among his countrymen. The reaſon is obvious; *he* wanted ſuch ſupports; *Chriſt* did not; and hence the marked difference of their conduct in this inſtance. It is the natural difference between truth and impoſture. That the power of God and not of man was the foundation on which our Lord meant to erect his new ſyſtem, very ſoon appeared; for the next thing we hear of him is, that he "went about all Galilee teaching in their ſynagogues, and preaching the goſpel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of ſickneſs and all manner of diſeaſe among the people†."

Here then began that DEMONSTRATION OF THE SPIRIT AND OF POWER, which was to be the grand baſis of his new kingdom, the great evidence of his heavenly miſſion. It is indeed probable that the wiſdom and the authority with which he ſpake, and the weight and importance of the doctrines he taught, would of themſelves make a deep impreſſion on the minds of his hearers, and produce him ſome followers. But had he ſtopt here, had he given his new diſciples nothing but words, their zeal and attachment to him would ſoon have abated. For it was natural for theſe converts to ſay to him, "You have called upon us to repent and to reform; you have commanded us to renounce our vices, to relinquiſh our favourite pleaſures and purſuits, to give up the world and its enjoyments, and to take up our croſs and follow you; and in return for this you promiſe us diſtinguiſhed happineſs and honour in your ſpiritual kingdom. You ſpake, it is true, moſt forcibly to our conſciences and to our hearts; and we feel ſtrongly diſpoſed to obey

* 1 Cor. ii. 4, 5. † Matth. iv. 23.

your injunctions, and to credit your promiſes; but ſtill the ſacrifice we are required to make is a great one, and the conflict we have to go through is a bitter one. We find it a moſt painful ſtruggle to ſubdue confirmed habits, and to part at once with all our accuſtomed pleaſures and indulgences. Before then we can entirely relinquiſh theſe, and make a complete change in the temper of our ſouls and the conduct of our lives, we muſt have ſome convincing proof that you have a right to require this compliance at our hands; that what you enjoin us is in reality the command of God himſelf; that you are actually ſent from heaven, and commiſſioned by him to teach us his will, and to inſtruct us in our duty; that the kingdom you hold out to us in another world is ſomething more than mere imagination: that you are in ſhort what you pretend to be, the SON OF GOD; and that you are able to make good the puniſhment you denounce againſt ſin, and the rewards you promiſe to virtue."

Our Lord well knew that this ſort of reaſoning muſt occur to every man's mind. He knew that it was highly proper and indiſpenſably neceſſary to give ſome evidence of his divine commiſſion, to do SOMETHING which ſhould ſatisfy the world that he was the Son of God, and the delegate of heaven. And how could he do this ſo effectually as by performing works which it utterly exceeded all the ſtrength and ability of man to accompliſh, and which nothing leſs than the hand of God himſelf could poſſibly bring to paſs? In other words, the proofs he gave of his miſſion were thoſe aſtoniſhing miracles which are recorded in the Goſpel, and which are here for the firſt time mentioned by St. Matthew in the 23d verſe of this chapter: "And Jeſus went about all Galilee, teaching in their ſynagogues, and preaching the goſpel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of ſickneſs and all manner of diſeaſe among the people."

This then is the primary, the fundamental evidence of his divine authority, which our Lord was pleaſed to give to his followers. His firſt application, as we have ſeen, was (like that of his precurſor, John the Baptiſt) to their *hearts*, "REPENT YE," lay aſide your vices and your prejudices,

Till this was done, till theſe grand obſtacles to the admiſſion of truth were removed, he well knew that all he could ſay and all he could do would have no effect; they would not be moved either by his exhortations or his miracles, "they would not be perſuaded though one roſe from the dead*." And in fact we find that ſeveral of the phariſees, men abandoned to vice and wickedneſs, did actually reſiſt the miracles of Chriſt, and the reſurrection of a man from the grave; they aſcribed his caſting out devils to Beelzebub; they were not convinced by the cure of the blind man, and the raiſing of Lazarus from the dead, though they ſaw them both before their eyes, one reſtored to ſight, the other to life. This plainly proves how far the power of ſin and of prejudice will go in cloſing up all the avenues of the mind againſt conviction; and how wiſely our Saviour acted in calling upon his hearers to repent, before he offered any evidence to their underſtandings. But the way being thus cleared, the evidence was then produced, and the effect it had was ſuch as might be expected; for St. Matthew tells us, that his fame went throughout all Syria; and that there followed him *great multitudes* of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jeruſalem, and from Judea, and from beyond Jordan †; that is, from every quarter of his own country and the adjoining nations.

And indeed it can be no wonder that ſuch multitudes were convinced and converted by what they ſaw. The wonder would have been if they had not. To thoſe who were themſelves eye-witneſſes of his miracles, they muſt have been (except in a few inſtances of inveterate depravity of heart) irreſiſtible proofs of his divine miſſion. When they ſaw him give eyes to the blind, feet to the lame, health to the ſick, and even life to the dead, by ſpeaking only a few words, what other concluſion could they poſſibly draw than that which the centurion did, *truly this was the Son of God*‡. To us indeed who have not ſeen theſe mighty works, and who live at the diſtance of eighteen hundred years from the time when they were wrought, the force of this evidence is undoubtedly leſs than it was to an eye witneſs. But if the reality of theſe miracles is proved to us

* Luke, xvi. 31. † Matth. iv. 24, 25. ‡ Matth. xxvii. 54.

by ſufficient teſtimony, by teſtimony ſuch as no ingenuous and unprejudiced mind can withſtand, they ought ſtill to produce in us the firmeſt belief of the divine power of him who wrought them*.

It muſt be admitted at the ſame time, that theſe miracles, being facts of a very uncommon and very extraordinary nature, ſuch as have never happened in our own times, and but very ſeldom even in former times, they require a much ſtronger degree of teſtimony to ſupport them than common hiſtorical facts. And this degree of teſtimony they actually have. They are ſupported by a body of evidence fully adequate to the caſe; fully competent to outweigh all the diſadvantages ariſing from the great diſtance and the aſtoniſhing nature of the events in queſtion.

1. In the firſt place, theſe miracles are recorded in four different hiſtories, written very near the time of their being performed; by four different men, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; two of whom ſaw theſe miracles with their own eyes; the other two had their account from them who did the ſame; and affirm, that "they had a *perfect* knowledge of every thing they relate†."

They were plain artleſs men, without the leaſt appearance of enthuſiaſm or credulity about them, and rather ſlow than forward to believe any thing extraordinary and out of the common courſe of nature. They were perfectly competent to judge of plain matters of fact, of things which paſſed before their eyes, and could certainly tell, without the leaſt poſſibility of being miſtaken, whether a perſon whom they knew to be blind was actually reſtored to ſight, and a perſon whom they knew to be dead was raiſed to life again by a few words ſpoken by their maſter. They were men, who, from the ſimplicity of their manners, were not at all likely to invent and publiſh falſehoods of ſo extraordinary a nature; much leſs falſehoods by which they could gain nothing, and did in fact loſe every thing. There is not therefore, from the peculiar character of theſe

* Mr. Hume's abſtruſe and ſophiſtical argument againſt miracles, has been completely refuted by Drs. Adams, Campbell, and Paley.

† Luke, i. 3.

perſons, the leaſt ground for diſbelieving the reality of any thing they relate. Nor is there any reaſon to doubt whether the writings we now have under their names are thoſe which they actually wrote. They have been received as ſuch ever ſince they were publiſhed; nor has any one argument been yet produced againſt their authenticity which has not been repeatedly and effectually confuted.

2. It is a very ſtrong circumſtance in favor of our Saviour's miracles, that they were related by contemporary hiſtorians, by thoſe who were eye-witneſſes of them, and were afterwards acknowledged to be true by thoſe who lived neareſt to the times in which they were wrought; and what is ſtill more to the point, by many who were hoſtile to the Chriſtian religion. Even the emperor Julian himſelf, that moſt bitter adverſary of Chriſtianity, who had openly apoſtatized from it who profeſſed the moſt implacable hatred to it, who employed all his ingenuity, all his accuteneſs and learning, which were conſiderable, in combating the truth of it, in diſplaying in the ſtrongeſt colours every objection he could raiſe up againſt it; even *he* did not deny the *reality* of our Lord's miracles.* He admitted that Jeſus wrought them, but contended that he wrought them by the power of magic.

3. Unleſs we admit that the founder of our religion did actually work the miracles aſcribed to him by his hiſtorians, it is utterly impoſſible to account for the ſucceſs and eſtabliſhment of his religion. It could not, in ſhort, to all apperance, have been eſtabliſhed by any other means.

Conſider only for a moment what the apparent conditon of our Lord was, when he firſt announced his miſſion among the Jews, what his pretenſions and what his doctries were, and then judge what kind of a reception he muſt have met with among the Jews, had his preaching been accompanied by no miracles. A young man of no education, born in

* Julian apud Cyrillum, L. vi, viii. t. Celſus alſo acknowledged the truth of the goſpel miracles in general, but aſcribed them to the aſſiſtance of demons. "The Chriſtians, ſays he, ſeem to *prevail, daimonōn tinōn onomaſi kai kataklēſeſi*, by virtue of the names and the invocation of certain demons." Orig. contra Celſum, ed. Cantab. l. i. p. 7.

in obſcure village, of obſcure parents, without any of thoſe very brilliant talents or exterior accompliſhments which uſually captivate the hearts of men; without having previouſly written or done any thing that ſhould excite the expectation, or attract the attention and admiration of the world, offers himſelf at once to the Jewiſh nation, not merely as a preacher of morality, but as a teacher ſent from heaven; nay what is more as the Son of God himſelf, and as that great deliverer, the Meſſiah, who had been ſo long predicted by the prophets, and was then ſo anxiouſly expected, and eagerly looked for by the Jewiſh people. He called upon this people to renounce at once a great part of the religion of their forefathers, and to adopt that which he propoſed to them; to relinquiſh all their fond ideas of a ſplendid, a victorious, a triumphant Meſſiah, and to accept in his room a deſpiſed, a perſecuted, and a crucified maſter: he required them to give up all their former prejudices ſuperſtitions, and traditions, all their favourite rites and ceremonies, and what was perhaps ſtill dearer to them, their favourite vices and propenſities, their hypocriſy, their rapaciouſneſs, their voluptuouſneſs. Inſtead of exterior forms he preſcribed ſanctity of manners; inſtead of waſhing their hands, and making clean their platters, he commanded them to purify their hearts and reform ther lives. Inſtead of indulging in eaſe and luxury, he called upon them to take up their croſs and follow him through ſorrows and ſufferings; to pluck out a right eye, and to cut off a right arm; to leave father, mother, brethren, and ſiſters, for his name's ſake, and the goſpel.

What now ſhall we ſay to doctrines ſuch as theſe delivered by ſuch a perſon as our Lord appeared to be? Is it probable, is it poſſible that the reputed ſon of a poor mechanic could, by the mere force of argument or perſuaſion, induce vaſt numbers of his countrymen to embrace opinions and practices ſo directly oppoſite to every propenſity of their hearts, to every ſentiment they had imbibed, every principle they had acted upon from their earlieſt years? Yet the fact is, that he *did* prevail on multitudes to do ſo; and therefore he *muſt* have had means of conviction ſuperior to all human eloquence or reaſoning; that is, he muſt have

convinced his hearers by the miracles he wrought, that all power in heaven and in earth was given to him, and that every precept he delivered, and every doctrine he taught, was the voice of God himself. Without this it is utterly impossible to give any rational account of his success.

In order to set this argument in a still stronger point of view, let us consider what the effect actually was in a case where a new religion was proposed without any support from miracles. That same impostor Mahomet, to whom I before alluded, began his mission with every advantage that could arise from personal figure, from insinuating manners, from a commanding eloquence, from an ardent enterprising spirit, from considerable wealth, and from powerful connections. Yet with all these advantages, and with every artifice and every dexterous contrivance to recommend his new religion to his countrymen, in the space of three years he made only about six converts, and those principally of his own family, relations, and most intimate friends. And his progress was but very slow for nine years after this, till he began to make use of force; and then his victorious arms, not his arguments, carried his religion triumphantly over almost all the eastern world.

It appears therefore, that without the assistance either of miracles or of the sword, no religion can be propagated with such rapidity, and to such an extent, as the Christian was, both during our Saviour's life time, and after his death. For there is, I believe, no instance in the history of mankind of such an effect being produced, without either the one or the other. Now of force we know that Jesus never did make use; the unavoidable consequence is, that the miracles ascribed to him were actually wrought by him.

4. These miracles being wrought not in the midst of friends, who were disposed to favor them, but of most bitter and determined enemies, whose passions and whose prejudices were all up in arms, all vigorous and active against them and their author, we may rest assured that no false pretence to a supernatural power, no frauds, no collusions, no impositions, would be suffered to pass undetected and unexposed, that every single miracle would be most

critically and moſt rigorouſly ſifted and enquired into, and no art left unemployed to deſtroy their credit and counteract their effect. And this in fact we find to be the caſe.—Look into the ninth chapter of St. John, and you will ſee with what extreme care and diligence, with what anxiety and ſolicitude the phariſees examined, and re-examined, the blind man that was reſtored to ſight by our Saviour, and what pains they took to perſuade him, and to make him ſay, that he was *not* reſtored to ſight by Jeſus.

"They brought," ſays St. John, "to the phariſees him that aforetime was blind; and the phariſees aſked him how he had received his ſight. And he ſaid unto them, Jeſus put clay upon mine eyes and I waſhed, and did ſee. A plain and ſimple and honeſt relation of the fact. But the Jews, not content with this, called for his parents, and aſked them, ſaying, Is this your ſon who ye ſay was born blind? How then doth he now ſee? His parents, afraid of bringing themſelves into danger, very diſcreetly anſwered, We know that this is our ſon, and that he was born blind; but by what means he now ſeeth we know not, or who hath opened his eyes we know not; he is of age, aſk him, he ſhall ſpeak for himſelf. They then called the man again, and ſaid to him, Give God the praiſe, we know that this man (meaning Jeſus) is a ſinner. The man's anſwer is admirable: Whether he be a ſinner or no, I know not; but this I know, that whereas I was blind, now I ſee.—Since the world began, was it not known that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing. And they anſwered him and ſaid, Thou waſt altogether born in ſin, and doſt *thou* teach us? And they caſt him out." A very effectual way it muſt be confeſſed of confuting a miracle.

The whole of this narrative (from which I have only ſelected a few of the moſt ſtriking paſſages) is highly curious and inſtructive, and would furniſh ample matter for a variety of very important remarks. But the only uſe I mean to make of it at preſent, is to obſerve, that it proves, in the cleareſt manner, how very much awake and

alive the Jews were to every part of our Saviour's conduct. It ſhews that his miracles were preſented not to perſons prepoſſeſſed and prejudiced in his favor, not to inattentive or negligent, or credulous ſpectators, but to acute, and inquiſitive, and hoſtile obſervers, to men diſpoſed and able to detect impoſture wherever it could be found. And it is utterly impoſſible that the miracles of Chriſt could have paſſed the fiery ordeal of ſo much ſhrewdneſs and ſagacity, and authority, and malignity united, if they had not been carried through it by the irreſiſtible force of truth, and of that divine power which nothing could reſiſt.

5. The miracles of our Lord were not merely tranſient acts, beheld at the moment with aſtoniſhment, but forgot as ſoon as over, and productive of no important conſequences. They gave birth to a new religion, to a new mode of worſhip, to ſeveral new and ſingular inſtitutions, ſuch as the rite of baptiſm, the ſacrament of the Lord's ſupper, the appropriation of the *firſt* day of the week to ſacred purpoſes, the eſtabliſhment of a diſtinct order of men for the celebration of divine offices, and other things of the ſame nature. Now this religion and theſe inſtitutions ſubſiſt to this day. And as the books of the New Teſtament affirm that this religion and theſe inſtitutions were firſt eſtabliſhed, and afterwards made their way by the power of miracles, they are ſtanding teſtimonies to the truth and the reality of thoſe miracles, without which they could never have taken ſuch firm and deep root at the firſt, and continued unſhaken through ſo many ages to the preſent time. The magnitude and permanency of the ſuperſtructure prove that it could not have had a leſs ſolid, a leſs ſubſtantial foundation.

6. And laſtly, when we conſider the great ſacrifices made by the firſt converts to Chriſtianity, particularly by the apoſtles and primitive teachers of it; how many deep-rooted prejudices and favorite opinions they gave up to it; what a total change it produced in their diſpoſition, their temper, their manners, their principles, their habits, and the whole complexion of their lives; what infinite pains they took to propagate it; how chearfully they re-

linquiſhed for this purpoſe all the eaſe, the comfort, the conveniencies, the pleaſures, and the advantages of life; and inſtead of them embraced labours, hardſhips, ſufferings, perſecutions, torments, and death itſelf; we cannot rationally ſuppoſe that ſuch patience, reſignation, fortitude, magnanimity, and perſeverance, could poſſibly be produced by any leſs powerful cauſe than thoſe evidences of divine power exhibited in the miracles of Chriſt; which demonſtrably proved that he and his religion had a divine original, and that therefore the ſufferings they underwent for his ſake in the preſent life would be amply repaid by the glorious rewards reſerved for them hereafter.

When, therefore, we put together all theſe conſiderations, they can leave no doubt on any unprejudiced mind, that the account given in this chapter of the firſt commencement of our Saviour's miniſtry, and the reaſons of his aſtoniſhing ſucceſs, are perfectly accurate and true; namely, "that he went about all Galilee, teaching in the ſynagogues, and preaching the goſpel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of ſickneſs, and all manner of diſeaſe among the people." And our concluſion from this muſt neceſſarily be the ſame with that of the great Jewiſh rulers, who, with a laudable anxiety to know the truth, came to Jeſus by night, and addreſſed him in theſe words: "Rabbi, we *know* that thou art a teacher come from God: *for no man can do theſe miracles that thou doeſt, except God be with him.*"*

* John, iii. 2.

LECTURE VI.

MATTH. CHAP. V.

OUR bleſſed Lord having by his miracles eſtabliſhed his divine authority, and acquired of courſe a right to the attention of his hearers, and a powerful influence over their minds, proceeds in the next place to explain to them in ſome degree the nature of his religion, the duties it enjoins, and the diſpoſitions it requires. This he does in what is commonly called his ſermon on the mount; which is a diſcourſe of conſiderable length, being extended through this and the two following chapters; and we may venture to ſay it contains a greater variety of new, important, and excellent moral recepts, than is any where to be found in the ſame compaſs. At the ſame time it does not pretend to give a regular, complete, and perfect ſyſtem of ethics, or to lay down rules for the regulation of our conduct in every poſſible inſtance that can ariſe. This would have been an endleſs taſk, and would have multiplied precepts to a degree that would in a great meaſure have defeated their utility and deſtroyed their effect.* Our Lord took the wiſer and more impreſſive method of tracing out to us only the great outlines of our duty, of giving us general principles and comprehenſive rules, which we may ourſelves apply to particular caſes, and the various ſituations in which we may be placed.

He begins with diſcribing thoſe diſpoſitions and virtues which mark the Chriſtian character, in which the Goſpel peculiarly delights, but which the world deſpiſes and rejects.

"Bleſſed, ſays he, are the poor in ſpirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.

* Vid. John, xxi. 25.

Bleſſed are they that mourn, for they ſhall be comforted.

Bleſſed are the meek, for they ſhall inherit the earth.

Bleſſed are they which do hunger and thirſt after righteouſneſs, for they ſhall be filled.

Bleſſed are the merciful, for they ſhall obtain mercy.

Bleſſed are the pure in heart, for they ſhall ſee God.

Bleſſed are the peace-makers, for they ſhall be called the children of God.

Bleſſed are they which are perſecuted for righteouſneſs ſake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Bleſſed are ye when men ſhall revile you, and perſecute you, and ſhall ſay all manner of evil againſt you falſely for my ſake: rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven."*

It is evident that our Lord here ment at the very outſet of his public inſtructions, to mark at once in the ſtrongeſt and moſt decided terms the peculiar temper, ſpirit, and character of his religion; and to ſhew to his diſciples how completely oppoſite they were to all thoſe ſplendid and popular qualities which were the great objects of admiration and applauſe to the heathen world; and are ſtill too much ſo even to the Chriſtian world. "There are (as a very able advocate for Chriſtianity well obſerves†) two oppoſite characters under which mankind may generally be claſſed. The one poſſeſſes vigour, firmneſs, reſolution, is daring and active, quick in its ſenſibilities, jealous of its fame, eager in its attachments, inflexible in its purpoſes, violent in its reſentments.

The other, meek, yielding, complying, forgiving; not prompt to act, but willing to ſuffer; ſilent and gentle under rudeneſs and inſult; ſuing for reconciliation where others would demand ſatisfaction; giving way to the puſhes of impudence; conceding and indulgent to the preju-

* Matth. v. 3—12. † Dr. Paley, V. ii, p. 30.

ſtices, the wrongheadedneſs, the intractability of thoſe with whom he has to deal."

The former of theſe characters is and ever has been the favourite of the world; and though it is too ſtern to conciliate affection, yet it has an appearance of dignity in it which too commonly commands reſpect.

The latter is, as our Lord deſcribes it, humble, meek, lowly, devout, merciful, pure, peaceable, patient, and unreſiſting. The world calls it mean-ſpirited, tame, and abject; yet, notwithſtanding all this, with the divine Author of our religion this is the favourite character; this is the conſtant topic of his commendation; this is the ſubject that runs through all the beatitudes. To this he aſſigns, under all its various forms, peculiar bleſſings. To thoſe who poſſeſs it, he promiſes that they ſhall inherit the earth; that they ſhall obtain mercy; that theirs ſhall be the kingdom of heaven; that they ſhall ſee God, and ſhall be called the *children* of God.

The recommendation of this character recurs frequently in different ſhapes throughout the whole of the ſermon on the mount, and a great part of that diſcourſe is nothing more than a comment on the text of the beatitudes.—On theſe and a few other paſſages which have any thing particularly novel and important in them, I ſhall offer ſome obſervations.

But before I quit this noble and conſolatory exordium of our Lord's diſcourſe, I ſhall requeſt your attention to one particular part of it, which ſeems to require a little explanation.

The part I allude to is this: "Bleſſed are the meek, for they ſhall inherit the earth."

The bleſſing here promiſed to the meek, ſeems at firſt ſight ſomewhat ſingular, and not very appropriate to the virtue recommended.

That the *meek* of all others ſhould be deſtined to inherit the earth, is what one ſhould not naturally have expected;

If we may judge from what paſſes in the world, it is thoſe of a quite oppoſite character, the bold, the forward, the active, the enterpriſing, the rapacious, the ambitious, that are beſt calculated to ſecure to themſelves that inheritance. And undoubtedly, if by inheriting the earth is meant acquiring the wealth, the grandeur, the power, the property of the earth, theſe are the perſons who generally ſeize on a large proportion of thoſe good things, and leave the meek, and the gentle far behind them in this unequal conteſt for ſuch advantages. But it was far other things than theſe our Lord had in view. By inheriting the earth, he meant inheriting thoſe things which are, without queſtion, the greateſt *bleſſings* upon earth, calmneſs and compoſure of ſpirit, tranquillity, cheerfulneſs, peace and comfort of mind. Now theſe, I apprehend, are the peculiar portion and recompence of the *meek*. Unaſſuming, gentle, and humble in their deportment, they give no offence, they create no enemies, they provoke no hoſtilities, and thus eſcape all that large proportion of human miſery which ariſes from diſſenſions and diſputes. If differences *do* unexpectedly ſtart up, by patience, mildneſs, and prudence, they diſarm their adverſaries, they ſoften reſentment, they court reconciliation, and ſeldom fail of reſtoring harmony and peace. Having a very humble opinion of themſelves, they ſee others ſucceed without uneaſineſs, without envy; having no ambition, no ſpirit of competition, they feel no pain from diſappointment, no mortification from defeat. By bending under the ſtorms, that aſſail them, they greatly mitigate their violence, and ſee them paſs over their heads almoſt without feeling their force. Content and ſatisfied with their lot, they paſs quietly and ſilently through the crowds that ſurround them; and encounter much fewer difficulties and calamities in their progreſs through *life* than more active and enterpriſing men. This even tenor of life may indeed be called by men of the world flat, *dull*, and inſipid. But the meek are excluded from no rational pleaſure, no legitimate delight; and as they are more exempt from anxiety and pain than other men, their ſum total of happineſs is greater, and they may, in the beſt ſenſe of the word, be fairly ſaid *to inherit the earth*.

I shall now proceed to notice such other passages of this admirable discourse, as appear to me to deserve peculiar attention and consideration.

The first of these is that which begins with the 21st verse: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill, shall be in danger of the judgment; but I say unto you, that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; but whosoever shall say, thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire." And again in the same manner at the 27th verse: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, thou shalt not commit adultery; but I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."

I put these two instances together, because they both enforce the same great leading principle, and both illustrate one great distinguishing excellence of the morality taught by our Saviour; namely, that it does not content itself with merely controlling our outward actions, but it goes much deeper, it imposes its restraints, it places its guard exactly where it ought to do, on our thoughts and on our hearts. Our Lord here singles out two cases, referring to two different species of passions, the malevolent and the sensual, and he pronounces the same sentence, the same decisive judgment on both; that the thing to be regulated is the *intention*, the *passion*, the *propensity*. Former moralists contented themselves with saying, thou shalt not kill. But *I* (says our Lord) go much further; *I* say thou shalt not indulge any *resentment* against thy brother, thou shalt not use any reproachful or contemptuous language towards him; for it is these things that lead and provoke to the most atrocious deeds. Former moralists have said, thou shalt not commit adultery. But *I* say, let not thine *heart* or thine *eye* commit adultery; for here it is that the sin begins; and here it must be crushed in its birth.

This is wiſdom, this is morality in its moſt perfect form, in its eſſence, and in its firſt principles. Every one that is acquainted with men and manners muſt know that our Lord has here ſhewn a conſummate knowledge of human nature; that he has laid his finger on the right place, and exerted his authority where it was moſt wanted, in checking the firſt movements of our criminal deſires. Every one muſt ſee and feel, that bad thoughts quickly ripen into bad actions; and that if the latter only are forbidden, and the former left free, all morality will ſoon be at an end. Our Lord therefore, like a wiſe phyſician, goes at once to the bottom of the evil; he extirpates the firſt germ and root of the diſeaſe, and leaves not a ſingle fibre of it remaining to ſhoot up again in the heart.

It was obvious to foreſee that the diſciples, and the people to whom our Saviour addreſſed himſelf, would conſider this as very ſevere diſcipline, and would complain bitterly, or at leaſt murmur ſecretly, at the hardſhips of parting with all their favorite paſſions, of eradicating their ſtrongeſt natural propenſities, of watching conſtantly every motion of their hearts, and guarding thoſe iſſues of life and death, thoſe fountains of virtue and of vice, with the moſt unremitting attention. But all this our divine maſter tells them is indiſpenſably neceſſary. All theſe cautions muſt be uſed, all this vigilance muſt be exerciſed, all this ſelf-government muſt be exerted, all theſe ſacrifices muſt be made. It is the price we are to pay (beſides that price which our Redeemer paid,) and ſurely no unreaſonable one, for eſcaping eternal miſery, and rendering ourſelves capable of eternal glory. He therefore, goes on to ſay, in terms highly figurative and alarming, but not too ſtrong for the occaſion, "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out and caſt it from thee; for it is profitable for thee that *one* of thy members ſhould periſh, and not that thy whole body ſhould be caſt into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off and caſt it from thee; for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members ſhould periſh, and not that thy whole body ſhould be caſt into hell*." Every one muſt immediately ſee that the eye to be plucked

* Matth. v. 29, 30.

out is the eye of concupiſcence, and the hand to be cut off is the hand of violence and vengeance; that is, theſe paſſions are to be checked and ſubdued, let the conflict coſt us what it may.

This naturally leads our divine teacher, in the next verſe, to a ſubject cloſely connected with one of our ſtrongeſt paſſions, and that is, the power of divorce. Among the Jews and the Heathens, but more particularly the latter, this power was carried to a great extent, and exerciſed with the moſt capricious and wanton cruelty. The beſt and moſt affectionate of wives were often diſmiſſed for the ſlighteſt reaſons, and ſometimes without any reaſon at all. It was high time for ſome ſtop to be put to theſe increaſing barbarities, and it was a taſk worthy of the Son of God himſelf to ſtand up as the defender and protector of the weak, of the moſt helpleſs and moſt oppreſſed part of the human ſpecies. Accordingly he here declares, in the moſt poſitive terms, that the only legitimate cauſe of divorce is adultery. "It has been ſaid, whoſoever ſhall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement. But I ſay unto you, whoſoever ſhall put away his wife, ſaving for the cauſe of fornication, cauſeth her to commit adultery; and whoſoever marrieth her that is divorced, committeth adultery*. This has, by the experience of ages, been found to be a moſt wiſe and ſalutary proviſion, and no leſs conducive to the happineſs than to the virtue of mankind. And we are taught by the fatal example of other nations, that wherever this law of the Goſpel has been abrogated or relaxed, and a greater facility of divorce allowed, the conſequence has conſtantly been a too viſible depravation of manners, and the deſtruction of many of the moſt eſſential comforts of the married ſtate.

The paſſage to which I ſhall next advert, is the following: "Ye have heard it has been ſaid, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But *I* ſay unto you, that ye reſiſt not evil; but whoſoever ſhall ſmite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other alſo; and if any man will ſue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have

* Matth. v. 31—34.

thy cloak alſo; and whoſoever ſhall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain*."

By the Moſaic law, retaliation was permitted; an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, might *legally* be demanded†. Among the ancient heathens, private revenge was indulged without ſcruple and without mercy. The ſavage nations in America, as well as in almoſt every other part of the world, ſet no bounds to the perſevering rancour and the cool deliberate malignity with which they will purſue, for years together, not only the perſon himſelf from whom they have received an injury, but ſometimes every one related to or connected with him. The Arabs are equally implacable in their reſentments; and the Koran itſelf, in the caſe of murder, allows private revenge‡.

It was to check this furious, ungovernable paſſion, ſo univerſally prevalent over the earth, that our Saviour delivers the precepts now before us. "I ſay unto you reſiſt not evil; but if any one ſmite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other alſo." No one can imagine that this injunction, and thoſe of the ſame kind that follow, are to be underſtood ſtrictly and literally; that we are to ſubmit, without the leaſt oppoſition, to every injury and every inſult that is offered to us, and are abſolutely precluded from every degree of ſelf-preſervation and ſelf-defence. This can never be intended; and the example of St. Paul, who repelled with proper ſpirit, the inſult offered him as a Roman citizen, very clearly proves that we are not to permit ourſelves to be trampled on by the foot of pride and oppreſſion, without expreſſing a juſt ſenſe of the injury done to us, and endeavoring to avert and repel it. It cannot therefore, be meant, that if any one, by a cruel and expenſive litigation, ſhould deprive us of a part of our property, we ſhould not only relinquiſh to him that part, but requeſt him alſo to accept every thing elſe we have in the world. Nor can it be meant, that if a man ſhould actually ſtrike us on one cheek, we ſhould immedi-

* Matth. v. 38—41. † Levit. xxiv. 20. Deut. xix. 21.
‡ Koran, v 2. c. 17. p. 109.

stely turn to him the other, and desire the blow to be repeated. This could not possibly answer any one rational purpose, nor conduce in the least to the peace and happiness of mankind, which were certainly the objects our Saviour had in view; on the contrary, it would tend materially to obstruct both by inviting injury, and encouraging insult and oppression. Common sense therefore, as well as common utility, require that we should consider the particular instances of behaviour under the injuries here specified, as nothing more than strong oriental idioms, as proverbial and figurative expressions, intended only to convey a general precept, and to describe that peculiar *temper* and *disposition* which the Gospel requires; that patience, gentleness, mildness, moderation, and forbearance under injuries and affronts, which is best calculated to preserve the peace of our own minds, as well as that of the world at large; which tends to soften resentment and turn away wrath; and without which, on one side or the other, provocations must be endless, and enmities eternal.

All therefore, that is here required of us is plainly and simply this, that we should not suffer our resentment of injuries to carry us beyond the bounds of justice, equity, and Christian charity; that we should not (as St. Paul well explains this passage) *recompence evil for evil*[a], that is, repay one injury by committing another; that we should not take fire at every slight provocation or trivial offence, nor pursue even the greatest and most flagrant injuries with inplacable fury and inextinguishable rancour: that we should make all reasonable allowances for the infirmities of human nature, for the passions, the prejudices, the failings, the misapprehensions of those we have to deal with; and without submitting tamely to oppression or insult, or giving up rights of *great and acknowledged importance*, should always show a disposition to conciliate and forgive; and rather to recede and give way a little in certain instances, than insist on the *utmost* satisfaction and reparation that we have perhaps a strict right to demand.

[a] Rom. xii. 17.

The chapter concludes with another remarkable precept, which may ſtrictly be called a *new* commandment; for in no moral code is it to be found, till our Lord gave it a place in his.

The precept is this: "Ye have heard it has been ſaid, thou ſhalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But *I* ſay unto you, love your enemies, bleſs them that curſe you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which deſpitefully uſe you, and perſecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh his ſun to riſe on the evil and on the good, and ſendeth rain on the juſt and on the unjuſt*."

So noble, ſo ſublime, and ſo benevolent a precept, was never before given to man; and it is one ſtrong proof, among many others, of the originality of our Saviour's character and religion.

The Jews were expreſsly commanded to love their neighbor; but this injunction was not extended to their enemies, and they therefore thought that this was a tacit permiſſion to *hate* them; a concluſion which ſeemed to be much ſtrengthened by their being enjoined to wage eternal war with one of their enemies, the Canaanites, to ſhow them no mercy, but to root them out of the land. In conſequence of this, they *did* entertain ſtrong prejudices and malignant ſentiments toward every other nation but their own, and were juſtly reproached for this by the Roman hiſtorian; "apud ipſos miſericordia in promptu, adverſus omnes alios hoſtile odium†:" that is, towards each other they are compaſſionate and kind; towards all others they cheriſh a deadly hatred. But it ought in juſtice to be obſerved, that this remark of Tacitus might have been applied, with almoſt equal aptitude, both to his own countrymen the Romans, and to the Greeks, for they gave to all other nations but themſelves the name of barbarians; and having ſtigmatized them with this opprobrious appellation, they treated them as if they were in reality what they had wantonly thought fit to call them.

* Matth. v. 43—45. † Tacit. Hiſt. v. 5.

They treated them with inſolence, contempt, and cruelty. They created and carried on unceaſing hoſtilities againſt them, and never ſheathed the ſword till they had exterminated or enſlaved them.

In private life alſo, it was thought allowable to purſue thoſe with whom they were at variance with the keeneſt reſentment and moſt implacable hatred; to take every opportunity of annoying and diſtreſſing them, and not to reſt till they had felt the ſevereſt effects of unrelenting vengeance.

In this ſituation of the world, and in this general ferment of the malevolent paſſions, how ſeaſonable, how ſalutary, how kind, how conciliatory was the command to love, not only our friends, not only our neighbours, not only ſtrangers, but even our enemies! How gracious that injunction, "*I* ſay unto you, love your enemies; do good to them that hate you, bleſs them that curſe you, and pray for them that deſpitefully uſe you, and perſecute you!" And how touching, how irreſiſtible is the argument uſed to enforce it: "That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh his ſun to riſe on the evil and on the good, and ſendeth rain on the juſt and on the unjuſt!"

It is remarkable that the philoſopher Seneca makes uſe of the ſame argument, not exactly for the ſame purpoſe, but for a ſimilar one. "If (ſays he) you would imitate the gods, confer favors even on the ungrateful, for the ſun riſes on the wicked, and the ſeas are open even unto pirates:" And again, "the gods ſhow many acts of kindneſs even to the ungrateful*." It is highly probable that the philoſopher took this ſentiment from this very paſſage of St. Matthew; for no ſuch ſublime morality is, I believe, to be found in any heathen writer *previous* to the Chriſtian revelation.

Seneca flouriſhed and wrote after the Goſpels were written, after Chriſtianity had made ſome progreſs. Beſides

* Sen. de Benef. lib. 4. c. 26. and c. 28.

this, he was brother to Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia, before whose tribunal St. Paul was brought by the Jews at Corinth.† From him he would of course receive much information respecting this new religion, and the principal characters concerned in it; and from the extraordinary things he would hear of it from such authentic sources, his curiosity would naturally be excited to look a little further into it, and to peruse the writings that contained the history and the doctrines of this new school of philosophy. This, and this only, can account for the fine strains of morality we sometimes meet with in Seneca, Plutarch, Marcus Antoninus, Epictetus, and the other philosophers who wrote after the Christian æra, and the visible superiority of *their* ethics to those of their predecessors before that period. But to return.

It has been objected to this command of *loving our enemies*, that it is extravagant and impracticable; that it *is* impossible for any man to bring himself to entertain any real love for his enemies: and that human nature *revolts* and recoils against so unreasonable a requisition.

This objection evidently goes upon the supposition that we are to love our enemies in the same manner and degree, and with the same cordiality and ardour of affection, that we do our relations and friends. And if this were required, it might indeed be considered as a harsh injunction. But our Lord was not so severe a task-master as to expect this at our hands. There are different degrees of love as well as of every other human affection; and these degrees are to be duly proportioned to the different objects of our regard. There is one degree due to our relations, another to our benefactors, another to our friends, another to strangers, another to our enemies. There is no need to define the precise shades and limits of each, our own feelings will save us that trouble; and in that only case where our feelings are likely to lead us wrong, this precept of our Lord will direct us right.

And it exacts nothing but what is both reasonable and practicable. It explains what is meant by *loving* our

† Acts xviii. 12.

enemies in the words that immediately follow; "Bleſs them that curſe you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that deſpitefully uſe you, and perſecute you:" that is, do not *retaliate* upon your enemy; do not return his execrations, his injuries, and his perſecutions, with ſimilar treatment; do not turn upon him his own weapons, but endeavor to ſubdue him with weapons of a celeſtial temper, with kindneſs and compaſſion. This is of all others the moſt effectual way of vanquiſhing an enraged adverſary. The interpretation here given is amply confirmed by St. Paul in his epiſtle to the Romans, which is an admirable comment on this paſſage. "Dearly beloved, ſays he, avenge not yourſelves, but rather give place unto wrath; for vengeance is mine, I will repay, ſaith the Lord. Therefore, if thine enemy hunger feed him; if he thirſt, give him drink. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good*." This then is the *love* that we are to ſhow our enemies; not that ardour of affection which we feel towards our friends, but that lower kind of *love*, which is called Chriſtian charity (for it is the ſame word in the original) and which we ought to exerciſe toward every human being, eſpecially in diſtreſs. If even our enemy hunger, we are to feed him; if he thirſt, we are to give him drink; and thus ſhall obtain the nobleſt of all triumphs, "we ſhall overcome evil with good." The world if they pleaſe may call this meanneſs of ſpirit; but it is in fact the trueſt magnanimity and elevation of ſoul. It is far more glorious and more difficult to ſubdue our own reſentments, and to act with generoſity and kindneſs to our adverſary, than to make him feel the ſevereſt effects of our vengeance. It is this nobleſt act of ſelf-government, this conqueſt over our ſtrongeſt paſſions, which our Saviour here requires. It is what conſtitutes the higheſt perfection of our nature: and it is this *perfection* which is meant in the concluding verſe of this chapter; Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect†;" that is, in your conduct towards your enemies approach as near as you are able to that perfection of mercy which your heavenly Father manifeſts towards

* Rom. xii. 19—21. † Matth. v. 48.

his enemies, towards the evil and the unjuſt, on whom he maketh his ſun to riſe as well as on the righteous and the juſt. This ſenſe of the word *perfect* is eſtabliſhed beyond controverſy by the parallel paſſages in St. Luke; where, inſtead of the terms made uſe of by St. Matthew, "Be ye therefore *perfect*, as your Father which is in heaven, is perfect," the evangeliſt expreſsly ſays, "Be ye therefore *merciful*, as your Father alſo is merciful.*

This then is the perfection which you are to exert your utmoſt efforts to attain; and if you ſucceed in your attempt, your reward ſhall be great indeed; you ſhall, as our Lord aſſures you, be the *children of the Moſt High.*†

Having now brought theſe Lectures to a concluſion for the preſent year, I cannot take my leave of you without expreſſing the great comfort and ſatisfaction I have derived from the appearance of ſuch numerous and attentive congregations as I have ſeen in this place. That ſatisfaction, if I can at all judge of my own ſentiments and feelings, does not originate from any ſelfiſh gratification, but from the real intereſt I take in the welfare, the eternal welfare of every one here preſent; from the hope I entertain that ſome uſeful impreſſions may have been made upon your minds; and from the evidence which this general earneſtneſs to hear the word of God explained and recommeded affords, that a deeper ſenſe of duty, a more ſerious attention to the great concerns of eternity, has, by the bleſſing of God been awakened in your ſouls. If this be ſo, allow me moſt earneſtly to entreat you not to let this ardour cool; not to let theſe pious ſentiments die away; not to let theſe good ſeeds be choaked by the returning cares and pleaſures of the world. But go, retire into your cloſets, fall down upon your knees before your Maker, and fervently implore him to pour down upon you the overruling influences of his Holy Spirit; to enlighten your underſtandings, to ſanctify your hearts, to ſubdue your paſſions, to confirm your good reſolutions, and enable you to reſiſt every enemy of your ſalvation.

* Luke vi. 36. † Matth. v. 45.

The world will ſoon again diſplay all its attractions before you, and endeavor to extinguiſh every good principle you have imbibed. But if the divine truths you have heard explained and enforced in theſe Lectures have taken any firm root in your minds; if you are ſeriouſly convinced that Chriſt and his religion came from heaven, and that he is able to make good whatever he has promiſed and whatever he has threatened, there is nothing ſurely in this world that can induce you to riſque you the loſs of eternal happineſs, or the infliction of never-ceaſing puniſhment.

Leaſt of all, will you think that this is the preciſe moment for ſetting your affections on this world and its enjoyments; that theſe are the times for engaging in eager purſuits after the advantages, the honors, the pleaſures of the preſent life; for plunging into vice, for diſſolving in gaiety and pleaſures, for ſuffering every trivial, every inſignificant object, to baniſh the remembrance of your Maker and Redeemer from your hearts, where they ought to reign unrivalled and ſupreme. Surely amidſt the dark clouds that now hang over us,* theſe are *not* the things that will brighten up our proſpects, that will leſſen our danger, that will calm our apprehenſions, and ſpeak peace and comfort to our ſouls. No, it muſt be ſomething of a very different nature; a deep ſenſe of our own unworthineſs, a ſincere contrition for our paſt offences, a proſtration of ourſelves in all humility before the throne of grace, an earneſt application for pardon and acceptance through the merits of him who died for us (whoſe death and ſufferings for our ſakes the approaching week will bring freſh before our view,) an ardent deſire to manifeſt our love and gratitude, our devotion and attachment to our Maker and our Redeemer, by giving them a decided priority and predominance in our affections and our hearts; by making their will the ruling principle of our conduct; the attainment of their favor, the advancement of their glory, the chief object of our wiſhes and deſires. Theſe are the ſentiments we ought to cultivate and cheriſh if we wiſh for any ſolid comfort under calamity or affliction, any confi-

* In March 1798.

dence in the favor and protection of Heaven; theſe alone can ſupport and ſuſtain our ſouls in the midſt of danger and diſtreſs, at the hour of death, and in the day of judgment.

And how then, are theſe holy ſentiments, theſe heavenly affections to be excited in our hearts? Moſt certainly not by giving up all our time and all our thoughts to the endleſs occupations, the never-ceaſing gaities and amuſements of this diſſipated metropolis; but by withdrawing ourſelves frequently from this tumultuous ſcene, by retiring into our chamber, by communing with our own hearts, by fervent prayer, by holding high converſe with our Maker, and cultivating ſome acquaintance with that unſeen world to which we are all haſtening, and which, in one way or other, muſt be our portion for ever.

Many of thoſe whom I now ſee before me have, from their high rank and ſituation in life, full leiſure and ample opportunities for all theſe important purpoſes; and let them be aſſured, that a ſtrict account will one day be demanded of them in what manner and with what effect they have employed the talents, the time, and the many other advantages with which their gracious Maker has indulged them.

And even thoſe who are moſt engaged in the buſy and laborious ſcenes of life, have at leaſt *one* day in the week which they may, and which they ought to dedicate to the great concerns of religion. Let then *that* day be kept ſacred to its original deſtination by all ranks of men, from the higheſt to the loweſt. Let it not be profaned by needleſs journeys, by ſplendid entertainments, by crowded aſſemblies, by any thing in ſhort which precludes either ourſelves, our families, or our domeſtics, from the exerciſe of religious duties, or the improvement of thoſe pious ſentiments and affections which it was meant to inſpire. Let me not, however, be miſunderſtood. I mean not that it ſhould be either to the rich or the poor, or to any human being whatever, a day of gloom and melancholy, a day of ſuperſtitious rigor, and of abſolute excluſion from all ſociety and all innocent recreation. I know of

nothing in Scripture that requires this; I know of no good effect that could result from it. On the contrary, it is a festival, a *joyful* festival; a day to which we ought always to look forward with delight, and enjoy with a thankful and a grateful heart. But let it be remembered at the same time, that it is a day which God claims as *his own*; that he has stamped upon it a peculiar mark of sanctity; and that it ought to be distinguished from every other day, in the first place, by resting from our usual occupations, and giving rest to our servants and our cattle; in the next, by attendance on the public worship of God; and in the remaining intervals, by relaxations and enjoyments *peculiarly its own*; not by quotidian tumult, noise, and dissipation; but by the calm and silent pleasures of retirement, of recollection, of devout meditation, of secret prayer, yet mingled discreetly with select society, with friendly converse, with sober recreation, and with decent cheerfulness throughout the whole.

It was to draw off our attention from the common follies and vanities of the week, and to give the soul a little pause, a little respite, a little breathing from the incessant importunities of business and of pleasure, that this holy festival was instituted. And if we cannot give up these things for a *single* day, if we cannot make this small sacrifice to Him from whom we derive our very existence, it is high time for us to look to our hearts, and to consider very seriously whether such a disposition and temper of mind as this will ever qualify us for the kingdom of heaven.

"Could ye not watch with me *one* hour?" Said our divine Master to his slumbering companions*. Can ye not give me *one* day out of seven? May he now say to his thoughtless disciples. Let none of us then ever subject ourselves to this bitter reproach. Let us resolve from this moment to make the Christian sabbath a day of holy joy and consolation; a day of heavenly rest and refreshment; and above all, a day for the attentive perusal of those sacred pages which have been the subject of these Lectures, and of your most serious attention. It is to be hoped, in-

* Mark xiv. 37.

deed, that we ſhall not confine our religion and our devotion to that day only; but even *that* day properly employed, will in ſome degree ſanctify all the reſt. It will diſengage us (as it was meant to do) gradually and gently from that world, which we muſt ſoon (perhaps ſooner than we imagine) quit for ever; it will raiſe our thoughts above the low and trivial purſuits of the preſent ſcene, and fix them on nobler and worthier objects; it will refine and purify, exalt and ſpiritualize our affections; will bring us nearer and nearer to God, and to the world of ſpirits; and thus lead us on to that CELESTIAL SABBATH, that EVERLASTING REST, for which the Chriſtian ſabbath was meant to prepare and harmonize our ſouls.

LECTURE VII.

MATTH. CHAP. vi. AND vii.

IN theſe two chapters our Lord continues and concludes his admirable diſcourſe from the Mount.

The firſt thing to be noticed here is a ſtrong and repeated caution to avoid all ſhow and oſtentation in the performance of our religious duties.

The three inſtances ſpecified are the acts of giving alms, of praying, and of faſting.

The direction with regard to the firſt is, "Take heed that you do not your alms before men, to be ſeen of them, otherwiſe ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doeſt thy alms, do not ſound a trumpet before thee as the hypocrites do in the ſynagogues and in the ſtreets, that they may have glory of men; verily I ſay unto you, they have their reward. But when *thou* doeſt alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth, that thine alms may be in ſecret; and thy Father which ſeeth in ſecret himſelf ſhall reward thee openly."*

In the ſame manner with regard to prayer; the rule is, "When thou prayeſt thou ſhalt not be as the hypocrites are, for they love to pray ſtanding in the ſynagogues and in the corners of the ſtreets, that they may be ſeen of men; verily I ſay unto you they have their reward.—But thou, when thou haſt ſhut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in ſecret; and thy Father which ſeeth in ſecret ſhall reward thee openly."†

* Matth. vi. 1—4 † Ibid, 5—6.

Laſtly, a ſimilar precaution applies alſo to the act of faſting; "When ye faſt, be not as the hypocrites of a ſad countenance, for they diſfigure their faces that they may appear unto men to faſt; verily I ſay unto you they have their reward. But thou, when thou faſteſt, anoint thy head and waſh thy face, that thou appear not unto men to faſt, but unto thy Father which is in ſecret; and thy Father which ſeeth in ſecret ſhall reward thee openly."*

In all theſe paſſages the point to be noticed is a ſtrong and marked diſapprobation of every thing that looks like oſtentation, parade, vain-glory, inſincerity, or hypocriſy, in the diſcharge of our Chriſtian duties. They ſhow in the cleareſt light the ſpirit and temper of the Chriſtian religion, which is modeſt, ſilent, retired, quiet, unobtruſive, ſhunning the obſervation and the applauſe of men, and looking only to the approbation of him who ſeeth every thought of our hearts, and every ſecret motive of our actions.

They eſtabliſh this as the grand principle of action for every diſciple of Chriſt, that in every part of his moral and religious conduct he is to have no other object in view but *the favour of God.* This is the motive from which all his virtues are to flow. If he is actuated by any other; if he courts the applauſe of the world, or is ambitious to acquire, by a ſhow of piety, a character of ſanctity among men, he may perhaps gain his point; but it is *all* he will gain. He will have his reward here; he muſt expect none hereafter.

Having made this general obſervation upon the whole, I ſhall now proceed to remark on the particular inſtances adduced, in order to eſtabliſh the leading principle.

And firſt, we are directed to give our alms ſo privately, that (as our Lord moſt emphatically and elegantly expreſſes it) "our left hand ſhall not know what our right hand doeth." This evidently implies the utmoſt ſecrecy in the diſtribution of our charity; and this is undoubtedly the

* Matth. vi. 16—18.

rule we are in general to obſerve. But it is by no means to be inferred from hence that we are never, on any occaſion, to give our alms in public. In ſome caſes, publicity is ſo far from being culpable, that it is neceſſary, uſeful, and laudable. In contributing, for inſtance, to any public charity, or to the relief of ſome great calamity, private or public, we cannot well conceal our beneficence, or if we could we ought not. Our example may induce many others to exert a ſimilar generoſity; and beſides this there are perſons in certain ſituations who are expected to be charitable, and who ſhould give proofs to the world that they are ſo. And accordingly in theſe and in ſuch like caſes we are required to make our "light ſo ſhine before men, that they may ſee our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven."* As far therefore as the *reaſon* of this command goes, it is not only allowable, but our duty, to let our generous deeds be *ſometimes* known to the world. But then we ought to take eſpecial care at the ſame time that we beſtow a much *larger* proportion of our alms in ſecrecy and in ſilence; that we ſuffer no one to witneſs our benificence but Him who *muſt* ſee every thing we do, and that we have no other object whatever in view but his approbation, and his immortal rewards.

The next inſtance adduced to confirm the general principle of ſeeking the approbation not of men, but of God, is that of prayer.

"When thou prayeſt, thou ſhalt not be as the hypocrites are, for *they* love to pray ſtanding in the ſynagogues and in the corners of the ſtreets, that they may be ſeen of men; verily I ſay unto you, they have their reward.—But thou when thou prayeſt, enter into thy cloſet, and when thou haſt ſhut the door, pray to thy Father which is in ſecret and thy Father which ſeeth in ſecret ſhall reward thee openly."

This paſſage has been made uſe of by ſome writers as an argument againſt all *public* prayer, which they ſay is here plainly prohibited. But for this there is not the

* Matth. v. 16.

ſmalleſt foundation. It is of *private* prayer only that our Lord is here ſpeaking; and the hypocrites whom he condemns were thoſe oſtentatious Jews, who performed thoſe devotions which ought to have been confined to the cloſet, in the ſynagogues, and even in the public ſtreets, that they might be noticed and applauded for their extraordinary piety and ſanctity. But this reproof could not poſſibly mean to extend to *public* devotions in places of worſhip.—This is evident from the *corners of ſtreets* being mentioned; for thoſe are places in which public devotions are never performed. But beſides this, we find in Scripture that public worſhip is enjoined as a duty of the higheſt importance. It made a conſiderable part of the Jewiſh religion, and the Moſaic law is filled with precepts and directions concerning it. God declares, by the prophet Iſaiah, "that his houſe ſhall be called a houſe of prayer for *all* people."* Our Saviour quotes theſe very words when he caſt out thoſe that polluted the temple; and was himſelf a conſtant frequenter of divine worſhip, both in the temple and in the ſynagogues. He taught his diſciples (as we ſhall ſoon ſee) a form of prayer, which, though very proper to be uſed by any ſingle perſon in private, yet is throughout expreſſed in the plural number, and adapted to the uſe of ſeveral perſons praying at the ſame time.—"If two of you," ſays he to his diſciples on another occaſion, "ſhall agree on earth touching any thing that they ſhall aſk, it ſhall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven; for where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midſt of them."† By St. Paul we are commanded "not to forſake the aſſembling of ourſelves together, as the manner of ſome is."‡ And we find, that after our Saviour's aſcenſion his followers "continued ſtedfaſtly in the apoſtles doctrine and fellowſhip, and in prayer, and ſupplication, praiſing God, and having favor with all the people."§

It is therefore inconteſtably clear, that our Saviour could not poſſibly mean to forbid that public worſhip which he himſelf practiſed and commanded. His intentions could

* Iſaiah lvi. 7. † Matth. xviii. 19—20.
‡ Heb. x. 25. § Acts ii. 42. 47.

only be to confine our private prayers to private places, in which we are to keep up a ſecret intercourſe with our Maker, withdrawn from the eye of the world, and unobſerved by any other than that Almighty Being to whom our petitions are addreſſed.

The laſt inſtance produced by our Saviour is that of faſting. "When ye faſt, be not as the hypocrites of a ſad countenance, for they disfigure their faces that they may appear unto men to faſt; verily I ſay unto you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou faſteſt, anoint thy head and waſh thy face, that thou appear not unto men to faſt, but unto thy Father which is in ſecret; and thy Father which ſeeth in ſecret ſhall reward thee openly."

There is very little neceſſity to dwell on this precept here, for there are ſcarce any in theſe times and in this country who ſeem diſpoſed to make a *ſhow* of faſting, or to be ambitious of acquiring a reputation for that kind of religious diſcipline; on the contrary, it is by great numbers entirely laid aſide, and too frequently treated with deriſion and contempt. Yet from this very paſſage we may learn that it ought to be conſidered in a much more ſerious light; for although our Saviour did not command his diſciples to faſt whilſt he was with them, yet he himſelf faſted for forty days. He here plainly ſuppoſes that his diſciples did ſometimes faſt; and gives them directions how to perform that duty in a manner acceptable to God. And it appears alſo, that if they did ſo perform it, if they faſted without any oſtentation or parade, with a deſign not to catch the applauſe of men, but to approve themſelves to God, he aſſured them *they ſhould have their reward.*

Before we quit this diviſion of the chapter, we muſt go back a little to that admirable form of prayer which our Lord gave to his diſciples, after cautioning them againſt all oſtentation in their devotions.

This prayer ſtands unrivalled in every circumſtance that conſtitutes the perfection of prayer, and the excellence of that ſpecies of compoſition. It is conciſe, it is

perſpicuous, it is ſolemn, it is comprehenſive, it is adapted to all ranks, conditions, and claſſes of men; it fixes our thoughts on a few great important points, and impreſſes on our minds a deep ſenſe of the goodneſs and the greatneſs of that Almighty Being to whom it is addreſſed.

It begins with acknowledging him to be our moſt gracious and merciful Father; it begs that his name may every where be reverenced, that his religion may ſpread over the earth, and that his will may be obeyed by men with the ſame ardour, and alacrity, and conſtancy that it is by the angels in heaven. It next intreats the ſupply of all our eſſential wants, both temporal and ſpiritual; a ſufficiency of thoſe things that are abſolutely neceſſary for our ſubſiſtence; the forgiveneſs of our tranſgreſſions, on condition that we forgive our brethren; and, finally, ſupport under the temptations that aſſault our virtue, and deliverance from the various evils and calamities that every where ſurround us; expreſſing at the ſame time the utmoſt truſt and confidence in the power of God, to grant whatever he ſees it expedient and proper for his creatures to receive.

The full meaning then of this admirable prayer, and of the ſeveral petitions contained in it, may perhaps be not improperly expreſſed in the following manner:

O thou great Parent of the univerſe, our Creator, our Preſerver and continual Benefactor, grant that we and all reaſonable creatures may entertain juſt and worthy notions of thy nature and attributes, may fear thy power, admire thy wiſdom, adore thy goodneſs, rely upon thy truth; may reverence thy holy name, may bleſs and praiſe thee, may worſhip and obey thee.

Grant that all the nations of the earth may come to the knowledge and belief of thy holy religion; that it may every where produce the bleſſed fruits of piety, righteouſneſs, charity, and ſobriety; that, by a conſtant endeavour to obey thy holy laws, we may approach, as near as the infirmity of our nature will allow, to the more perfect obedience of the angels that are in heaven;

and thus qualify ourſelves for entering into thy kingdom of glory hereafter.

Feed us, we beſeech thee, with food convenient for us. We aſk not for riches and honours; give us only what is neceſſary for our comfortable ſubſiſtence in the ſeveral ſtations which thy providence has allotted to us; and above all give us contented minds.

We are all, O Lord, the beſt of us miſerable ſinners.—Be not extreme, we beſeech thee, to mark what we have done amiſs, but pity our infirmities, and pardon our offences. Yet let us not dare to implore forgiveneſs from thee, unleſs we alſo from our hearts forgive our offending brethren.

We are ſurrounded, on every ſide, with temptations to ſin; and ſuch is the corruption and frailty of our nature, that without thy powerful ſuccour we cannot always ſtand upright. Take us then, O gracious God, under thy almighty protection; and amidſt all the dangers and difficulties of our Chriſtian warfare, be thou our refuge and ſupport. Suffer us not to be tempted above what we are able to bear, but ſend thy holy ſpirit to ſtrengthen our own weak endeavours, and enable us to eſcape or to ſubdue all the enemies of our ſalvation.

Preſerve us alſo, if it be thy bleſſed will, not only from ſpiritual, but from temporal evil. Keep us ever by thy watchful providence, both outward in our bodies, and inwardly in our ſouls; that thou, being in all caſes our ruler and guide, we may ſo paſs through things temporal as finally to loſe not the things eternal.

Hear us, O Lord our governor, from heaven thy dwelling place; and when thou heareſt, have regard to our petitions. They are offered up to thee in the fulleſt confidence that thy goodneſs will diſpoſe, and thy power enable thee to grant whatever thy wiſdom ſeeſt to be convenient for us, and conducive to our final happineſs.

The next thing which peculiarly demands our attention in this chapter is the declaration contained in the 24th

verſe, which preſents to us another fundamental principle of the Chriſtian religion; namely, the neceſſity of giving the *firſt* place in our hearts and our affections to God and religion, and purſuing other things only in ſubordination to thoſe great objects. "No man," ſays our Lord, "can ſerve two maſters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or elſe he will hold to the one and deſpiſe the other. Ye cannot ſerve God and mammon*."

The word mammon is generally interpreted to mean *riches* only; but the original rather directs us to take it in a more general ſenſe, as comprehending every thing that is capable of being an object of *truſt* or a ground of *confidence* to men of worldly minds; ſuch as wealth, power, honor, fame, buſineſs, ſenſual pleaſures, gay amuſements, and all the other various purſuits of the preſent ſcene. It is theſe that conſtitute what we uſually expreſs by the word *world*, when oppoſed to religion. Here then are the two maſters who claim dominion over us, God and the world; and one of theſe we *muſt* ſerve; both we cannot, becauſe their diſpoſitions and their commands are in general diametrically oppoſite to each other. The world invites us to indulge all our appetites without control; to entangle ourſelves in the cares and diſtractions of buſineſs; to engage with eagerneſs in endleſs conteſts for ſuperiority in power, wealth, and honor; or to give up ourſelves, body and ſoul, to gaiety, amuſement, pleaſure, and every kind of luxurious indulgence. Theſe are the ſervices which *one* maſter requires. But there is another maſter, whoſe injunctions are of a very different nature. That maſter is GOD; and *his* commands are, to give him our hearts; to love him with all our heart, and ſoul, and mind, and ſtrength; to be temperate in all things; to make our moderation known unto all men; to fix our affections on things above; to have our converſation in heaven; to caſt all our care upon him; and to take up our croſs and follow Chriſt.

Judge now whether it be poſſible to ſerve theſe two maſters at one and the ſame time, and to obey the commands

* Matth. vi. 24.

of each; commands ſo perfectly contradictory to each other.

Yet this is what a great part of mankind moſt abſurdly attempt; endeavor to divide themſelves between God and mammon, to compromiſe the matter as well as they can between the commands of one and the ſeductions of the other; to vibrate perpetually between vice and virtue, between piety and pleaſure, between inclination and duty; to render a worldly life and a religious life conſiſtent with each other; and to take as much as they can of the enjoyments and advantages of the preſent world, without loſing their hold on the rewards of the next.

Yet, in direct contradiction to ſo extravagant and preposterous a ſyſtem as this, Chriſt himſelf aſſures us here that we cannot ſerve two maſters; that we cannot ſerve God and mammon. Our Maker expects to reign abſolute in our hearts; he will not be ſerved by halves; he will not accept of a divided empire; he will not ſuffer us to halt between two opinions. We muſt take our choice, and adhere to one ſide or the other. "If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him*."

But what then are we to do? Are we to live in a ſtate of perpetual warfare and hoſtility with that very world in which the hand of Providence has placed us, and which is prepared in various ways for our reception and accommodation? Are we never to taſte of thoſe various delights which our Maker has poured ſo bountifully around us? Are we never to indulge thoſe appetites which he himſelf has planted in our breaſts? Are we ſo entirely to confine ourſelves to the paths of righteouſneſs, as never to enter thoſe that lead to power, to honor, to wealth, or to fame? Are we to engage in no ſecular occupations, to make no proviſion for ourſelves and our families? Are we altogether to withdraw ourſelves from the cares and buſineſs and diſtractions of the world, and give ourſelves wholly up to ſolitude, meditation, and prayer? Are we never to mingle in the chearful amuſements of ſociety? Are we not to

* 1 Kings, xviii. 21.

indulge ourſelves in the refined pleaſures of literary purſuits, nor wander even for a moment into the delightful regions of ſcience or imagination?

Were this a true picture of our duties, and of the ſacrifices which Chriſtianity requires from us; were theſe the commands of our divine lawgiver, well might we ſay with the aſtoniſhed diſciples, "who then can be ſaved?"

But the God whom we ſerve is not ſo hard a maſter, nor does his religion contain any ſuch ſevere reſtrictions as theſe. Chriſtianity forbids no neceſſary occupations, no reaſonable indulgencies, no innocent relaxations. It allows us to uſe the world, provided we do not abuſe it. It does not ſpread before us a delicious banquet, and then come with a "touch not, taſte not, handle not."* All it requires is, that our liberty degenerate not into licentiouſneſs, our amuſements into diſſipation, our induſtry into inceſſant toil, our carefulneſs into extreme anxiety and endleſs ſolicitude. So far from forbidding us to engage in buſineſs, it expreſsly commands us not to be ſlothful in it,† and to labor with our hands for the things that be needful; it enjoins every one to abide in the calling wherein he was called,‡ and perform all the duties of it. It even ſtigmatizes thoſe that provide not for their own, with telling them that they are worſe than infidels.§ When it requires us "to be temperate‖ in all things," it plainly tells us that we *may* uſe *all* things temperately; when it directs us "to make our moderation known unto all men,"¶ this evidently implies that within the bounds of moderation we may enjoy all the reaſonable conveniences and comforts of the preſent life.

But how then are we to reconcile this participation in the concerns of the preſent life, with thoſe very ſtrong declarations of ſcripture, "that we are not to be conformed to this world; that the friendſhip of the world is enmity with God; that we are to take *no thought* for the morrow; that we are to lay up treaſures no where but in hea-

* Coloſs. ii. 21.
† Rom. xii. 11. 1 Cor. iv. 12.
‡ 1 Cor. vii. 20.
§ 1 Tim. v. 8.
‖ 1 Cor. ix. 25.
¶ Philip. iv. 5.

ver; that we are to pray without ceasing; that we are to do *all* things to the glory of God; that we are not only to leave father, mother, brethren, sisters, and for the sake of Christ and his gospel, but that if we do not *hate* all these near and dear connections, and even our own lives, we cannot be his disciples*."

These, it must be acknowledged, are very strong expressions, and taken in their strict literal sense, do certainly imply that we are to abandon every thing that is most dear and valuable and delightful to us in this life, and to devote ourselves so entirely to the contemplation and love and worship of God, as not to bestow a single thought on any thing else, or to give ourselves the smallest concern about the affairs of this sublunary state.

But can any one imagine this to be the *real* doctrine of scripture? You may rest assured that nothing so unreasonable and extravagant is to be fairly deduced from these sacred writings.

In order then to clear up this most important point, three things are to be considered.

First, that were these injunctions to be understood in their literal signification, it would be utterly impossible for us to continue a week longer in the world. If, for instance, we were bound to pray without ceasing, and to take no thought whatever for the morrow, we must all of us quickly perish for want of the common necessaries of life.

2dly. It must be observed that all oriental writers, both sacred and profane, are accustomed to express themselves in bold ardent figures and metaphors, which, before their true meaning can be ascertained, require very considerable abatements, restrictions, and limitations.

3dly. What is most of all to the purpose, these abatements are almost constantly pointed out by scripture itself and whenever a very strong and forcible idiom is made

* Rom. xii. 2. Jam. iv. 4. Matth. vi. 20. 34. 1 Thess. v. 17. Ephes. vi. 18. 1 Cor. x. 31. Luke, xiv. 26.

ule of you will generally find it explained and modified by a different expreſſion of the ſame ſentiment, which either immediately follows, or occurs in ſome other paſſage of Scripture.

Thus in the preſent inſtance, when Chriſt ſays, "Ye cannot ſerve God and mammon; therefore, take no thought for your life what ye ſhall eat and what ye ſhall drink, nor yet for your body what ye ſhall put on:" this is moſt clearly explained a few verſes after, in theſe words, "Seek ye *firſt* the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs, and all theſe things ſhall be added unto you*." The meaning therefore of the precept is evidently this; not that we are abſolutely to take no thought for our life, and the means of ſupporting it; but that our thoughts are not to be *wholly* or *principally* occupied with theſe things. We are not to indulge an immoderate and unceaſing anxiety and ſolicitude about them: for that indeed is the true meaning of the original word *merimnaō*. In our Engliſh Bible, that word is tranſlated *take no thought*; but at the time when our tranſlation was made, that expreſſion ſignified only *be not too careful*. Our hearts, as it is expreſſed in another place, are not to be *overcharged* with the cares of this life*, ſo as to exclude all other concerns, even thoſe of religion.

In the ſame manner with reſpect to pleaſures, we are not forbid to have *any* love for them; we are only commanded not to be lovers of pleaſure *more* than lovers of God†.

When therefore it is ſaid, ye cannot ſerve God and mammon, the point contended for in reſpect to God is not excluſive *poſſeſſion*, but excluſive *dominion*. Other things may occaſionally for a certain time, and to a certain degree, have poſſeſſion of our minds, but they muſt not *rule*, they muſt not *reign* over them. We cannot ſerve two maſters; we can ſerve but one faithfully and effectually, and that one muſt be God. The concerns and comforts of this life may have their *due* place in our hearts,

* Luke, xxi. 34. † 2 Tim. iii. 4.

but they must not aspire to the *first*; this is the prerogative of religion alone; religion must be supreme and paramount over all. Every one, it has been often said, has his ruling passion. The ruling passion of the Christian must be the love of his Maker and Redeemer. This it is which must *principally* occupy his thoughts, his time, his attention, his heart. If there be any thing else which has gained the ascendency over our souls, on which our desires, our wishes, our hopes, our fears, are *chiefly* fixed, God is then dispossessed of his rightful dominion over us; we serve another master, and we shall think but little of our Maker, or any thing belonging to him.

His empire over our hearts must, in short, at all events be maintained. When this point is once secured, every inferior gratification that is consistent with his sovereignty, his glory, and his commands, is perfectly allowable; every thing that is hostile to them must at once be renounced.

This is a plain rule, and a very important one. It is the principle which our blessed Lord meant here to establish, and it must be the governing principle of our lives.

Next to this in importance is another command, which you will find in the 12th verse of the seventh chapter; "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets." As the former precepts which we have been considering relate to God, this relates to man; it is the grand rule by which we must in all cases regulate our conduct towards our neighbor; and it is a rule plain, simple, concise, intelligible, comprehensive, and every way worthy of its divine author. Whenever we are deliberating how we ought to act towards our neighbor in any particular instance, we must for a moment change situations with him in our own minds, we must place him in our circumstances and ourselves in his, and then whatever we should wish him to do to us, *that* we are to do to him. This is a process, in which, if we act fairly and impartially, we can never be mistaken. Our own feelings will determine our conduct at once better than all the casuists in the world.

But before we entirely quit the conſideration of this precept, we muſt take ſome notice of the obſervation ſubjoined to it, which will require a little explanation.

"Whatſoever ye would that men ſhould do to you, do ye even ſo to them; for this is the law and the prophets."

The concluding clauſe, *this is the law and the prophets*, has by ſome been interpreted to mean, this is the ſum and ſubſtance of all religion; as if religion conſiſted ſolely in behaving juſtly and kindly to our fellow creatures, and beyond this no other duty was required at our hands.—But this concluſion is as groundleſs as it is dangerous and unſcriptural.

There are duties ſurely of another order, equally neceſſary at leaſt, and equally important with thoſe we owe to our neighbor.

There are duties, in the firſt place, owing to our Creator, whom we are bound to honor, to venerate, to worſhip, to obey, and to love with all our hearts and ſouls, and mind, and ſtrength. There are duties owing to our Redeemer, of affection, attachment, gratitude, faith in his divine miſſion, and reliance on the atonement he made for us on the croſs. There are laſtly, acts of diſcipline and ſelf-government to be exerciſed over our corrupt propenſities and irregular deſires. Accordingly, in the very chapter we have juſt been conſidering, we are commanded to ſeek firſt the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs. We are in another place informed, that the love of God is the firſt and great commandment, and the love of our neighbor only the ſecond; and we are taught by St. James that one main branch of religion is to keep ourſelves unſpotted from the world*. It is impoſſible, therefore, that our bleſſed Lord could here mean to ſay, that our duty towards our neighbor was the whole of his religion; he ſays nothing in fact of *his* religion; he ſpeaks only of the Jewiſh religion, *the law and the prophets*; and of theſe he only ſays that one of the great objects they have in view is

* James i. 27.

to inculcate that ſame equitable conduct towards our brethren, which he here recommended†.

Let no one then indulge the vain imagination that a juſt, and generous, and compaſſionate conduct towards his fellow creatures conſtitutes the *whole* of his duty, and will compenſate for the want of every other Chriſtian virtue.

This is a moſt fatal deluſion; and yet in the preſent times a very common one. Benevolence is the favorite, the faſhionable virtue of the age; it is univerſally cried up by infidels and libertines as the firſt and only duty of man; and even many who pretend to the name of Chriſtians, are too apt to reſt upon it as the moſt eſſential part of their religion, and the chief baſis of their title to the rewards of the goſpel. But that goſpel, as we have juſt ſeen, preſcribes to us ſeveral other duties, which require from us the ſame attention as thoſe we owe to our neighbor; and if we fail in any of them, we can have no hope of ſharing in the benefits procured for us by the ſacrifice of our Redeemer. What then God and nature, as well as Chriſt and his apoſtles, have joined together, let no man dare to put aſunder. Let no one flatter himſelf with obtaining the rewards, or even eſcaping the puniſhments of the Goſpel, by performing only one branch of his duty; nor let him ever ſuppoſe that under the ſhelter of benevolence he can either on one hand evade the firſt and great command, the love of his Maker; or on the other hand that he can ſecurely indulge his favorite paſſions, can compound as it were with God for his ſenſuality by acts of generoſity, and purchaſe by his wealth a general licence to ſin. This may be very good pagan morality, may be very good moder philoſophy, but it is not Chriſtian godlineſs.

As it is my purpoſe to touch only on the moſt important and moſt generally uſeful parts of our Saviour's diſcourſe, I ſhall paſs over what remains of it, and haſten to the concluſion, which is expreſſed by the ſacred hiſtorian in theſe words: "And it came to paſs, that when Jeſus had

† See chap. xxii. 40. Rom. xiii. 8. Gal. v. 14. and Grotius on this verſe.

finished these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine; for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes*." Both his matter and his manner were infinitely beyond any thing they had ever heard before. He did not, like the heathen philosophers, entertain his hearers with dry metaphysical discourses on the nature of the supreme good, and the several divisions and subdivisions of virtue; nor did he, like the Jewish rabbies, content himself with dealing out ceremonies and traditions, with discoursing on mint and cummin, and estimating the breadth of a phylactery; but he drew off their attention from these trivial and contemptible things to the greatest and the noblest objects; the existence of one supreme Almighty Being, the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of the universe: the first formation of man; his fall from original innocence; the consequent corruption and depravity of his nature; the remedy provided for him by the goodness of our Maker and the death of our Redeemer; the nature of that divine religion which he himself came to reveal to mankind; the purity of heart and sanctity of life which he required; the communications of God's holy spirit to assist our own feeble endeavours here, and a crown of immortal glory to recompense us hereafter.

The morality he taught was the purest, the soundest, the sublimest, the most perfect that had ever before entered into the imagination, or proceeded from the lips of man. And this he delivered in a manner the most striking and impressive; in short, sententious, solemn, important, ponderous rules and maxims, or in familiar, natural, affecting similitudes and parables. He shewed also a most consummate knowledge of the human heart, and dragged to light all its artifices, subtleties, and evasions. He discovered every thought as it arose in the mind; he detected every irregular desire before it ripened into action. He manifested at the same time the most perfect impartiality. He had no respect of persons. He reproved vice in every station wherever he found it, with the same freedom and boldness; and he added to the whole the weight, the irre-

* Matth. vii. 28, 29.

ſiſtable weight of his own example. He and he only of all the ſons of men, acted up in every the minuteſt inſtance to what he taught; and his life exhibited a perfect portrait of his religion. But what completed the whole was, that he taught, as the evangeliſt expreſſes it, *with authority*, with the authority of a divine teacher. The ancient philoſophers could do nothing more than give good advice to their followers; they had no means of enforcing that advice; but our great Lawgiver's precepts are all DIVINE COMMANDS. He ſpoke in the name of God; he called himſelf the Son of God. He ſpoke in a tone of ſuperiority and authority, which no one before had the courage or the right to aſſume: and finally, he enforced every thing he taught by the moſt ſolemn and awful ſanctions, by a promiſe of eternal felicity to thoſe who obeyed him, and a denunciation of the moſt tremendous puniſhment to thoſe who rejected him.

Theſe were the circumſtances which gave our bleſſed Lord the authority with which he ſpake. No wonder then that the people "were aſtoniſhed at his doctrines; and that they all declared he ſpake as never man ſpake*."

* John vii. 46.

LECTURE VIII.

MATTH. viii.

THE eighth chapter of St. Matthew, a part of which will be the ſubject of this Lecture, begins with the miraculous cure of the leper, which is related in the following manner:

When our Lord was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him, and behold there came a leper and worſhipped him, ſaying, Lord, if thou wilt thou canſt make me clean. And Jeſus put forth his hand and touched him, ſaying, I *will*; be thou clean: and immediately his leproſy was cleanſed. And Jeſus ſaith unto him, ſee thou tell no man; but go thy way, ſhew thyſelf to the prieſt, and offer the gift that Moſes commanded, for a teſtimony unto them."

The leproſy is a diſorder of the moſt malignant and diſguſting nature. It was once common in Europe. Thoſe infected with it were called Lazars, who were ſeparated from all human ſociety (the diſeaſe being highly contagious) and were confined in hoſpitals called Lazarettos, of which it is ſaid there were no leſs than nine thouſand at one time in Europe. For the laſt two hundred years this diſtemper has almoſt entirely vaniſhed from this and other countries of Europe, and an inſtance of it now is but ſeldom to be met with. In the Eaſt it ſtill exiſts to a certain degree; and there in former ages it had its ſource and origin, and raged for a great length of time with extraordinary violence.

In the law of Moſes, there are very particular directions given concerning the treatment of lepers, and a ceremonial appointed for the examination of them by the prieſt

when they were ſuppoſed to be cured. But no *natural* remedy is preſcribed by Moſes for the cure of it. It was conſidered by the Jews as a diſeaſe ſent by God, and to be cured only by his interpoſition. There could not, therefore, be a ſtronger proof of our Saviour's divine power, than his curing this moſt loathſome diſeaſe, of which many inſtances beſides this occur in the Goſpels. The manner too in which he performed this cure was equally an evidence that all the fulneſs of the Godhead dwelt in him*; it was inſtantaneous, with a touch, and a few words, and thoſe words the moſt ſublime and dignified that can be imagined: I WILL; BE THOU CLEAN: and immediately the leproſy departed from him. This was plainly the language as well as the act of a God. I WILL; BE THOU CLEAN.

Yet with all this ſupernatural power there was no oſtentation or parade, no arrogant contempt of ancient ceremonies and inſtitutions (which an enthuſiaſt always tramples under foot;) but on the contrary a perfect ſubmiſſion to the eſtabliſhed laws and uſages of his country. He ſaid to the man who was healed, "See thou tell no man; but go thy way, ſhew thyſelf to the prieſt, and offer the gift that Moſes commanded, for a teſtimony unto them." Here he gave at once a ſtriking example both of humility and obedience. He enjoined the man to keep ſecret the aſtoniſhing miracle he had wrought, and he commanded him to comply with the injunctions of Moſes; to ſhew himſelf to the prieſt, to undergo the examination, and to offer the ſacrifice preſcribed by the law†; which at the ſame time that it ſhewed his diſpoſition to fulfil all righteouſneſs, eſtabliſhed the truth of the miracle beyond all controverſy, by making the prieſt himſelf the judge of the reality of the cure. This was not the mode which an impoſtor would have choſen.

After this miracle, the next incident that occurs is the remarkable and intereſting ſtory of the centurion, whoſe ſervant was cured of the palſy by our Saviour. The relation of this miracle is as follows; "When Jeſus was

* Coloſs. ii. 9. † Lev. xiv.

entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beſeeching him and ſaying, Lord, my ſervant lieth at home ſick of the palſy, grievously tormented*. And Jeſus ſaith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion anſwered and ſaid, Lord, I am not worthy that thou ſhouldeſt come under my roof, but ſpeak the word only, and my ſervant ſhall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having ſoldiers under me; and I ſay unto this man go, and he goeth; and to another come, and he cometh; and to a third do this, and he doeth it. When Jeſus heard it, he marvelled, and ſaid to them that followed him, Verily I ſay unto you, I have not found ſo great faith, no, not in Iſrael. And Jeſus ſaid unto the centurion, go thy way; and as thou haſt believed, ſo be it done unto thee: and his ſervant was healed in the ſelf-ſame hour."

This is the ſhort and edifying hiſtory of the Roman centurion; and the reaſon of its being recorded by the ſacred writers was, in the firſt place, to give a moſt ſtriking evidence of our Saviour's divine power, which enabled him to reſtore the centurion's ſervant to health *at a diſtance*, and without ſo much as ſeeing him; and in the next place to ſet before us, in the character of the centurion, an illuſtrious example of thoſe eminent Chriſtian virtues, humanity and charity, piety and generoſity, humility and faith.

Of the former of theſe virtues, humanity and charity,

*In the parrallel paſſage of St. Luke, chap. vii. it is ſaid that the centurion ſent meſſengers to Jeſus; but no mention is made of his coming to him in perſon. This difficulty may be cleared up by obſerving, that in ſcripture what any perſon does by his meſſengers he is frequently repreſented as doing by himſelf. Thus Chriſt, who preached to the Epheſians by his apoſtles, is ſaid to have preached to them himſelf. Eph. ii. 17. But it ſeems to me not at all improbable, that the centurion may both have ſent meſſengers to Jeſus, and afterwards gone to him in perſon. "Not thinking himſelf worthy," (as he himſelf expreſſes it) to go to Chriſt in the firſt inſtance, he ſent probably the elders of the Jews, and then ſome of his friends, to implore our Lord to heal his ſervant, not meaning to give him the trouble of coming to his houſe. But when he found that Jeſus was actually on his way to him, what was more natural for him than to haſten out of his houſe to meet him, and to make his acknowledgments to him in perſon?

he gave a very convincing proof in the ſolicitude he ſhewed for the welfare of his ſervant, and the ſtrong intereſt he took in the recovery of his health. And this is the more remarkable and the more honorable to the centurion, becauſe in general the treatment which the ſervants of the Romans experienced from their maſters was very different indeed, from what we ſee in the preſent inſtance. Theſe ſervants were almoſt all of them ſlaves, and were too commonly treated with extreme rigor and cruelty. They were often ſtrained to labor beyond their ſtrength, were confined to loathſome dungeons, were loaded with chains, were ſcourged and tortured without reaſon, were deſerted in ſickneſs and old age, and put to death for trivial faults and ſlight ſuſpicions, and ſometimes out of mere wantonneſs and cruelty, without any reaſon at all. Such barbarity as this, which was at that time by no means uncommon, which indeed has in a greater or leſs degree univerſally prevailed in every country where ſlavery has been eſtabliſhed, and which ſhows in the ſtrongeſt light the danger of truſting abſolute power of any kind, political or perſonal, in the hands of ſuch a creature as *man*; this barbarity, I ſay, forms a moſt ſtriking contraſt to the kindneſs and compaſſion of the centurion, who, though he had ſo much power over his ſlaves, and ſo many inſtances of its ſevereſt exertion before his eyes, yet made uſe of it as we here ſee, not for their oppreſſion and deſtruction, but their happineſs, comfort, and preſervation.

The next virtues which attract our notice in the centurion's character are his piety and generoſity. Theſe were eminently diſplayed in the affection he manifeſted towards the Jewiſh people, and his building them a place of worſhip at his own expence; for the elders of the Jews informed Jeſus, "that he loved their nation, and had built them a ſynagogue*."

The Jews, it is well known, were at this time under the dominion of the Romans. Their country was a Roman province, where this centurion had a military command; and they who are acquainted with the Roman hiſ-

* Luke vii. 5.

tory know well with what cruelty, rapacity, and oppreſſion, the governors and commanding officers in the conquered provinces too commonly behaved towards the people whom they were ſent to keep in awe. So far were they from building them temples or ſynagogues, that they frequently invaded even thoſe ſacred retreats, and laid their ſacrilegious hands on every thing that was valuable in them. Of this we have abundant proofs in the hiſtory of Verres, when governor of Sicily; and Verres was in many reſpects a faithful repreſentative of too large a part of the Roman governors. In the midſt of this brutality and inſolence of power does this gallant ſoldier ſtand up to patronize and aſſiſt a diſtreſſed and an injured people; and it is a teſtimony as glorious to his memory as it is ſingular and almoſt unexampled in his circumſtances, that he *loved the Jewiſh nation*, and that he gave a very deciſive and magnificent proof of it, by building them a ſynagogue; for there cannot be a ſtronger indication both of love to mankind and love towards God, than erecting places of worſhip where they are wanted*. Without buildings to aſſemble in, there can be no public worſhip. Without public worſhip there can be no religion; and what kind of creatures men become without religion; into what exceſſes of barbarity, ferocity, impiety, and every ſpecies of profligacy they quickly plunge, we have too plainly ſeen; God grant that we may never feel.

* There is a moſt dreadful want of this nature in the weſtern part of this great metropolis. From St. Martin's-in-the-Fields to Marybone church inclusive, a ſpace containing perhaps 200 000 ſouls. there are only five pariſh churches, St. Martin's, St. Anne's Soho, St. James's, St. George's Hanover Square. and the very ſmall church of Marybone. There are, it is true, a few chapels interſperſed in this ſpace; but what they can contain is a mere trifle, compared to the whole number of inhabitants in thoſe parts. and the loweſt claſſes are almoſt entirely excluded from them. The only meaſure that can be of any eſſential ſervice, is the erection of ſeveral ſpacious pariſh churches, capable of receiving very large congregations. and affording decent accommodations for the lower and inferior. as well as the higher orders of the people. In the reign of Queen Anne, a conſiderable ſum of money was voted by Parliament for fifty new churches It is moſt devoutly to be wiſhed that the preſent Parliament would, to a certain extent at leaſt, follow ſo honorable an example. It is, I am ſure, in every point of view, political, moral, and religious, well worthy the attention of the Britiſh legiſlature, A ſufficient number

The next remarkable feature in the character of the centurion is his humility. How completely this moſt amiable of human virtues had taken poſſeſſion of his ſoul, is evident from the *manner* in which he ſolicited our Saviour for the cure of his ſervant: how cautious, how modeſt, how diffident, how timid, how fearful of offending, even whilſt he was only begging an act of kindneſs for another! Twice did he ſend meſſengers to our Lord, as thinking himſelf unworthy to addreſs him in his own perſon; and when at our Saviour's approach to his houſe he himſelf came out to meet him, it was only to entreat him not to trouble himſelf any further; for that he was not worthy that Jeſus ſhould enter under his roof.

This lowlineſs of mind in the centurion is the more remarkable, becauſe *humility*, in the goſpel ſenſe of the word, is a virtue with which the ancients, and more particularly the Romans, were totally unacquainted. They had not even a word in their language to deſcribe it by. The only word that ſeems to expreſs it, *humilitas*, ſignifies baſeneſs, ſervility, and meanneſs of ſpirit, a thing very different from true Chriſtian humility; and indeed this was the only idea they entertained of that virtue.—Every thing that we call meek and humble, they conſidered as mean and contemptible. A haughty imperious overbearing temper, a high opinion of their own virtue and wiſdom, a contempt of all other nations but their own, a quick ſenſe and a keen reſentment, not only of injuries, but even of the ſlighteſt affronts, this was the favorite and predominant character among the Romans; and that gentleneſs of diſpoſition, that low eſtimation of our own merits, that ready preference of others to ourſelves, that fearfulneſs of giving offence, that abaſement of ourſelves in the ſight of God which *we* call *humility*, they conſidered as the mark of a tame, abject, and unmanly mind. When, therefore, we ſee this virtuous centurion differing ſo widely from his countrymen in this reſ-

of new pariſh churches, erected both in the capital and in other parts of the kingdom where they are wanted, for the uſe of the members of the church of England of all conditions, would very eſſentially conduce to the intereſts of religion, and the ſecurity and welfare of the eſtabliſhed Church.

ject, we may certainly conclude that his notions of morality were of a much higher ſtandard than theirs, and that his diſpoſition peculiarly fitted him for the reception of the Goſpel. For humility is that virtue, which, more than any other, diſpoſes the mind to yield to the evidences, and embrace the doctrines of the Chriſtian revelation. It is that virtue which the Goſpel was peculiarly meant to produce, on which it lays the greateſt ſtreſs, and in which perhaps, more than any other, conſiſts the true eſſence and vital principle of the Chriſtian temper. We, therefore, find the ſtrongeſt exhortations to it in almoſt every page of the Goſpel. "I ſay to every man that is among you," ſays St. Paul, "not to think more highly of himſelf than he ought to think, but to think ſoberly. Mind not high things: be not wiſe in your own conceits, but condeſcend to men of low eſtate. Stretch not yourſelves beyond your meaſure. Bleſſed are the poor in ſpirit, ſays our Lord, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Whoſoever ſhall humble himſelf as a little child, the ſame is greateſt in the kingdom of heaven. Though the Lord be high, yet hath he reſpect to the lowly. As for the proud, he beholdeth them afar off. Humble yourſelves in the ſight of the Lord, and he ſhall lift you up. God reſiſteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.—Learn of me, ſays our Saviour, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye ſhall find reſt unto your ſouls*."

I come now, laſtly, to conſider that remarkable part of the centurion's character, more particularly noticed by our Lord, I mean his FAITH. "I ſay unto you, I have not found ſo great faith, no, not in Iſrael." Now the reaſon of the high encomiums beſtowed on him by our Saviour on this account was, becauſe he reaſoned himſelf into a belief of our Lord's power to work miracles, even at a diſtance; becauſe he who had been bred up in the principles of heatheniſm, and whoſe only guide was the light of nature, did notwithſtanding frankly ſubmit himſelf to ſufficient evidence, and was induced by the accounts he had received of our Saviour's doctrines and miracles, to

* Rom. xii. 3. 6. 2 Cor. x. 14. Matth. v. 3. xviii. 4 Pſalm cxxviii. 6. James iv. 6. 10. Matth. xi. 29.

acknowledge that he was a divine perſon. Whereas the Jews, to whom he was firſt and principally ſent, who from their infancy were inſtructed in the Holy Scriptures, in which were ſuch plain and expreſs promiſes of the Meſſiah, and who actually did expect his coming about that time, ſuffered themſelves to be ſo blinded by their prejudices and paſſions, that neither the unſpotted ſanctity of his life, the excellence of his doctrine, nor the repeated and aſtoniſhing miracles which he wrought, could make the ſlighteſt impreſſion on the greater part of that ſtubborn people. Hence we may ſee how impoſſible it is for any degree of evidence to convince thoſe who are determined not to be convinced? and what little hopes there are of ever ſatisfying modern infidels, if they will not be content with the proofs they already have. They are continually complaining for want of evidence; and ſo were the Jews always calling out for new ſigns and new wonders, even when miracles were daily wrought before their eyes. We may, therefore, ſay of the former what our Saviour ſaid of the latter, "if they hear not Moſes and the prophets, neither will they be perſuaded, though one roſe from the dead*." It is poſſible, we find, for incredulity to reſiſt even ocular demonſtration; and when obſtinacy, vanity, and vice have got thorough poſſeſſion of the heart, they will not only ſubdue reaſon and enſlave the underſtanding, but even bar up all the ſenſes, and ſhut out conviction at every inlet to the mind. This was moſt eminently the caſe with ſome of the principal Jews. Becauſe our Saviour's appearance did not correſpond to their erroneous and preconceived idea of the Meſſiah, becauſe he was not a triumphant prince, a temporal hero and deliverer; but above all, becauſe he upbraided them with their vices, and preached up repentance and reformation, every teſtimony that he could give of his divine authority and power was rejected with ſcorn. In vain did he feed thouſands with a handful of proviſions; in vain did he ſend away diſeaſes with a word; in vain did he make the graves give back their dead, rebuke the winds and waves, and evil ſpirits ſtill more unruly and obſtinate than they. In anſwer to all this they could ſay, "Is not this the carpenter's

* Luke xvi 31.

ſon? Does he not eat and drink with publicans and ſinners, and with unwaſhen hands? Does he not even break the ſabbath, by commanding ſick men to carry their beds on that ſacred day*?" Theſe, doubtleſs, were unanſwerable arguments againſt miracles, ſigns, and prophecies, againſt the evidence of ſenſe itſelf, againſt the univerſal voice of nature, bearing teſtimony to Chriſt.

The honeſt centurion, on the contrary, without any Judaical prejudices to diſtort his underſtanding, without aſking any ill-timed and impertinent queſtions about the birth or family of Chriſt, attends only to the facts before him. He had heard of Jeſus, had heard of his unblemiſhed life, his heavenly doctrines, his numerous and aſtoniſhing miracles, had heard them confirmed by ſuch teſtimony as no ingenuous mind could reſiſt. He immediately ſurrenders himſelf up to ſuch convincing evidence; and ſo far from requiring (as the Jews continually did, and as modern ſceptics ſtill do) more and ſtronger proofs, he ſeems afraid of ſhewing the ſlighteſt diſtruſt of our Saviour's power. He declares his belief of his being able to perform a miracle at any diſtance; and entreats him not to give himſelf the trouble of coming to his houſe in perſon, but to ſpeak the word only and his ſervant ſhould be healed.

This, then, is the diſpoſition of mind we ought more particularly to cultivate; that freedom from ſelf-ſufficiency and pride and prejudice of every kind, that ſimplicity and ſingleneſs of heart which is open to conviction, and receives, without reſiſtance, the ſacred impreſſions of truth. It is the want of this, not of evidence, that ſtill makes infidels in Europe as it did at firſt in Aſia. It is this principle operating in different ways which now imputes to fraud and colluſion thoſe miracles which the Jews aſcribed to Beelzebub; which now rejects all *human teſtimony*, as it formerly did even the *perceptions of ſenſe*.

Such were the diſtinguiſhed virtues of this excellent centurion, the contemplation of whoſe character ſuggeſts to us a variety of important remarks.

* Matth. ix. 11. xiii. 55. Luke xi. 38. John v. 18.

The firſt is, that the miracles of our Lord had the fulleſt credit given to them, not only (as is ſometimes aſſerted) by low, obſcure, ignorant, and illiterate men, but by men of rank and character, by men of the world, by men perfectly competent to aſcertain the truth of any facts preſented to their obſervation, and not likely to be impoſed upon by falſe pretences. Of this deſcription was the centurion here mentioned, the Roman proconſul Sergius Paulus, Dionyſius a member of the ſupreme court of Areopagus at Athens, and ſeveral others of equal dignity and conſequence.

Secondly, the hiſtory of the centurion teaches us, that there is no ſituation of life, no occupation, no profeſſion, however unfavorable it may appear to the cultivation of religion, which precludes the poſſibility or exempts us from the obligation of acquiring thoſe good diſpoſitions, and exerciſing thoſe Chriſtian virtues which the Goſpel requires. Men of the world are apt to imagine that religion was not made for them; that it was intended only for thoſe who paſs their days in obſcurity, retirement, and ſolitude, where they meet with nothing to interrupt their devout contemplation, no allurements to divert their attention, and ſeduce their affections from heaven and heavenly things. But as to thoſe whoſe lot is caſt in the buſy and the tumultuous ſcenes of life, who are engaged in various occupations and profeſſions, or ſurrounded with gaities, with pleaſures and temptations, it cannot be expected that amidſt all theſe impediments, interruptions, and attractions, they can give up much of their time and thoughts to another and a diſtant world, when they have ſo many things that preſs upon them and arreſt thier attention in this.

Theſe, I am perſuaded, are the real ſentiments, and they are perfectly conformable to the actual practice of a large part of mankind. But to all theſe pretences the inſtance of the centurion is a direct, complete, and ſatisfactory anſwer. He was by his ſituation in life a man of the world. His profeſſion was that, which of all others, is generally conſidered as moſt adverſe to religious ſentiments

and habits, moſt contrary to the peaceful, humane, and gentle ſpirit of the Goſpel, and moſt expoſed to the faſcination of gaiety, pleaſure, thoughtleſſneſs, and diſſipation. Yet amidſt all theſe obſtructions to purity of heart, to mildneſs of diſpoſition and ſanctity of manners, we ſee this illuſtrious CENTURION riſing above all the diſadvantages of his ſituation, and inſtead of ſinking into vice and irreligion, becoming a model of piety and humility, and all thoſe virtues which neceſſarily ſpring from ſuch principles. This is an unanſwerable proof, that whenever men abandon themſelves to impiety, infidelity, and profligacy, the fault is not in the ſituation but in the heart; and that there is no mode of life, no employment or profeſſion, which may not, if we pleaſe, be made conſiſtent with a ſincere belief in the Goſpel, and with the practice of every duty we owe to our Maker, our Redeemer, our fellow-creatures, and ourſelves.

Nor is this the only inſtance in point; for it is extremely remarkable, and well worthy our attention, that among all the various characters we meet with in the New Teſtament, there are few repreſented in a more amiable light, or ſpoken of in ſtronger terms of approbation, than thoſe of certain military men. Beſides the centurion who is the ſubject of this Lecture, it was a centurion, who at our Saviour's crucifixion gave that voluntary, honeſt, and unprejudiced teſtimony in his favor, "*Truly this was the Son of God**." It was a centurion who generouſly preſerved the life of St. Paul, when a propoſition was made to deſtroy him after his ſhipwreck on the iſland of Melita†.—It was a centurion to whom Saint Peter was ſent by the expreſs appointment of God, to make him the firſt convert among the Gentiles: a diſtinction of which he ſeemed, in every reſpect, worthy; being, as we are told, "a juſt and a devout man, one that feared God with all his houſe, that gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway‡."

We ſee then that our centurion was not the only military man celebrated in the Goſpel for his piety and virtue;

* Matth. xxvii. 54. † Acts xxvii. 43. ‡ Acts x. 2.

nor are there wanting, thank God, diſtinguiſhed inſtances of the ſame kind in our own age, in our own nation, among our own commanders, and in the recent memory of every one here preſent. All which examples tend to confirm the obſervation already made, of the perfect conſiſtency of a military, and every other mode of life, with a firm belief in the doctrines and a conſcientious obedience to the precepts of religion.

Thirdly, there is ſtill another reflection ariſing from this circumſtance, with which I ſhall conclude the preſent Lecture; and this is, that when we obſerve men bred up in arms repeatedly ſpoken of in ſcripture in ſuch ſtrong terms of commendation as thoſe we have mentioned, we are authorized to conclude, that the profeſſion they are engaged in is not, as a miſtaken ſect of Chriſtians amongſt us profeſſes to think, an unlawful one. On the contrary, it ſeems to be ſtudiouſly placed by the ſacred writers in a favorable and an honorable light; and in this light it always has been and always ought to be conſidered. He who undertakes an occupation of great toil and great danger, for the purpoſe of ſerving, defending, and protecting his country, is a moſt valuable and reſpectable member of ſociety; and if he conducts himſelf with valor, fidelity, and humanity, and amidſt the horrors of war cultivates the gentle manners of peace, and the virtues of a devout and holy life, he moſt amply deſerves, and will aſſuredly receive the eſteem, the admiration, and the applauſe of his grateful country, and what is of ſtill greater importance, the approbation of his God.

LECTURE IX.

MATTHEW x.

I NOW proceed to the conſideration of the 10th Chapter of St. Matthew.

In the preceding chapter we find our Saviour working a great variety of miracles. He healed the man that was ſick of the palſy, and forgave his ſins; a plain proof of his divinity, becauſe none but God has the power and the prerogative of forgiving ſins; and therefore the Jews accuſed him of blaſphemy for *pretending* to this power. He alſo cured the woman who touched the hem of his garment. He raiſed to life the deceaſed daughter of the ruler of the ſynagogue. He reſtored to ſight the two blind men that followed him; and he caſt out from a dumb man the devil with which he was poſſeſſed, and reſtored him to his ſpeech. Theſe miracles are particularly recorded: but beſides theſe there muſt have been a prodigious number wrought by him, of which no diſtinct mention is made; for we are informed in the 31ſt verſe that he went about *all* the cities and villages teaching in their ſynagogues, and preaching the goſpel of the kingdom, and healing *every* ſickneſs and *every* diſeaſe among the people.

Theſe continued miracles muſt neceſſarily have produced a great number of converts. And accordingly we find the multitude of his followers was now ſo great, that he found it neceſſary to appoint ſome coadjutors to himſelf in this great work. "The harveſt truly is plenteous, ſays he to his diſciples, but the laborers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harveſt, that he would ſend forth laborers into his harveſt*."

* Matth. ix. 37, 38.

Theſe laborers he now determined to ſend forth; and in purſuance of this reſolution we find him in the beginning of this chapter calling together his diſciples, out of whom he ſelected twelve, called by St. Matthew apoſtles or meſſengers, whom he ſent forth to preach the goſpel, and furniſhed them with ample powers for that purpoſe; powers ſuch as nothing leſs than Omnipotence could beſtow. The names of theſe apoſtles were as follows; Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, another James, Thaddeus or Jude, Simon, Judas Iſcariot. Theſe twelve perſons, St. Matthew tells us, Jeſus ſent forth, and commanded them, ſaying, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any cities of the Samaritans enter ye not; but go rather to the loſt ſheep of the houſe of Iſrael; and as ye go, preach, ſaying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand[a]." This was the buſineſs which they were ſent to accompliſh; they were to go about the country of Judea, and to preach to the Jews in the firſt place the holy religion which their divine maſter had juſt began to teach. Then follow their *powers*; "heal the ſick, cleanſe the lepers, raiſe the dead, caſt out devils."

After this come their inſtructions, and a variety of directions how to conduct themſelves in the diſcharge of their arduous and important miſſion, of which I ſhall take notice hereafter; but muſt firſt offer to your conſideration a few remarks on this extraordinary deſignation of the apoſtles to their important office.

And in the firſt place, who were the men ſingled out by our bleſſed Lord for the purpoſe of diffuſing his religion through the world; that is for the very ſingular purpoſe of perſuading men to relinquiſh the religion of their anceſtors, the principles they had imbibed from their infancy, the cuſtoms, the prejudices, the habits, the ways of thinking which they had for a long courſe of years indulged, and to adopt in their room a ſyſtem of thinking and acting in many reſpects directly oppoſite to them; a religion expoſing them to many preſent hardſhips and ſe-

[a] Matth. x. 2—3.

vere trials, and referring them for their reward to a distant period of time, and an inviſible world. Was it to be expected that ſuch a change as this, ſuch a ſudden and violent revolution in the minds of men, could be brought about by common and ordinary inſtruments? Would it not require agents of a very ſuperior order, of conſiderable influence from their birth and wealth and ſituation in life, men of the profoundeſt erudition, of the brighteſt talents, of the moſt conſummate knowledge of the world and the human heart, of the moſt inſinuating manners, of the moſt commanding and faſcinating eloquence?—Were then the apoſtles of this deſcription? Quite the contrary. They were plain, humble, unpretending men, of low birth and low occupations, without learning, without education, without any extraordinary endowments, natural or acquired, without any thing in ſhort to recommend them but their ſimplicity, integrity, and purity of manners. With what hopes of ſucceſs could men ſuch as theſe ſet about the moſt difficult of all enterprizes, the reformation of a corrupt world, and the converſion of it to a new faith? Yet we all know that they actually did accompliſh theſe two moſt arduous things, and that on the foundations they laid the whole ſuperſtructure of the Chriſtian church has been raiſed, and the divine truths of the Goſpel ſpread through all parts of the civilized world. How then is this to be accounted for? It is utterly impoſſible to account for it in any way but that which Chriſt himſelf points out, in this very charge to his apoſtles: "Heal the ſick," ſays he to them in the 8th verſe, "cleanſe the lepers, raiſe the dead, caſt out devils." Here is the explanation of the whole myſtery. It was the powers with which they were inveſted, the miracles they were enabled to perform, which procured ſuch multitudes of converts. The people ſaw that God was with them, and that, therefore, every thing they taught muſt be true.

Here is at once a ſufficient cauſe aſſigned for the effect produced by agents, apparently ſo unequal to the production of it. We challenge all the infidels in the world to aſſign any other adequate cauſe. They have never yet done it; and we aſſert with confidence that they never can.

These then were the powers the Apostles carried along with them; and where shall we find the sovereign that could ever furnish his ambassadors with such qualifications as these? If they were asked with what authority they were invested, and what proofs they could give that they were actually commissioned to instruct mankind in the principles of true religion, by that great personage the Son of God, whose servants and ministers they pretended to be, their answer was short and decisive; bring us your sick, and we will heal them; shew us your lepers, and we will cleanse them; produce your dead, and we will restore them to life. It would not be very easy to dispute the authenticity of such credentials as these.

It is further to be observed on this head, that the circumstance of our Saviour not only working miracles himself, but also enabling others to perform them, is an instance of divine power, to which no other prophet or teacher before him, true or false, ever pretended. In this, as in many other respects, he stands unrivalled and alone.

After this follow some directions, no less singular and new. "Provide neither gold nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves*."

That is, they were to take a long journey, without making any other provision for it than the staff in their hand, and the clothes they had on, for, says Jesus, the workman is worthy of his meat; an intimation that the providence of God would watch over and supply their wants. This required some confidence in their Master; and unless they had good grounds for thinking that it was in his power to engage Providence on their side (or in other words, that he was actually the Son of God) they would scarce have run the risk of so unpromising an expedition. But this conclusion grows infinitely stronger when we come to the declaration in the next and following verses.

* Matth. x. 9—10.

"Behold, I ſend you forth as ſheep in the midſt of wolves; be ye therefore, wiſe as ſerpents, and harmleſs as doves. But beware of men; for they will deliver you up to the councils; and they will ſcourge you in the ſynagogues; and ye ſhall be brought before governors and kings for my name's ſake, for a teſtimony againſt them and the Gentiles; and the brother ſhall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child; and the children ſhall riſe up againſt their parents, and cauſe them to be put to death; and ye ſhall be hated of all men for my name's ſake*."

What now ſhall we ſay to this extraordinary and unexampled declaration?

When a ſovereign ſends his ambaſſadors to a foreign country, he makes an ample proviſion for their journey, he aſſigns them a liberal allowance for their ſupport, and generally holds out at the ſame time the proſpect of a future reward for their labors and their ſervices to their country on their return from their embaſſy. And without this few men would be diſpoſed to undertake the commiſſion.

But here every thing is the reverſe; inſtead of ſupport, they were to meet with perſecution; inſtead of an honorable reception, they were to experience univerſal hatred and deteſtation; inſtead of reward, they were to be expoſed to certain ruin and deſtruction, and to be let looſe like ſo many ſheep among wolves.

Can we now conceive it poſſible that any men in their ſenſes ſhould, without ſome very powerful and extraordinary motive, voluntarily undertake ſuch a commiſſion as this, in which their only recompence was to be affliction, miſery, pain, and death; in which all the natural affections of the human heart were to be extinguiſhed or inverted, and their neareſt relations, their parents, children, or brethren, were to be their perſecutors and executioners? Is it uſual for human beings wantonly and needleſsly to expoſe themſelves to ſuch evils as theſe, without the leaſt

* Matth. x. 16, 17, 18, 21, 22.

prospect of any advantage to themselves or their families? You may say perhaps that simple, ignorant, uneducated men, like the apostles, might easily be deluded by an artful leader, and betrayed into very dreadful calamities, and that we see multitudes thus deceived and ruined every day. It is true; but where in this case is the *art* of the leader, or the *delusion* of his followers? In the cases alluded to, men are induced to embark in perilous undertakings, and to run headlong into destruction, by fair promises and tempting offers, by promises of liberty, of wealth, of honor, of popularity, of glory. But here, instead of employing any art, or making any attempt to *deceive* his followers, our Saviour plainly tells them they are to expect nothing but what is most dreadful to human nature. Whatever they suffered, therefore, they suffered with their eyes open, and with their own free choice and consent. It is true they were plain ignorant men; but they could feel pain, and they could have no more fondness for misery and death than other people. Yet this they did actually and chearfully undergo at the command of their Lord. How is this to be explained and accounted for? Is there any instance upon record before this in the annals of the world, where twelve grave sober men, without any reason, and without being misled by any artifice or delusion whatever, voluntarily exposed themselves at the desire of another person to persecution, torment, and destruction! There must have been some cogent reason for such a conduct as this; and that reason could be nothing less than a full and perfect conviction, arising from the miracles which they saw with their own eyes, and which they themselves were enabled to perform, that Christ was what he pretended to be, the Son of God; that all power was given to him in heaven and on earth; and that he was able to fulfil the promises he had made them of a recompence in a future life, infinitely surpassing in magnitude and in duration all the sufferings they could experience in the present world.

This is the only rational account to be given of their conduct, and it presents to us in a short compass a strong convincing evidence of the truth of the Christian revelation.

In order to fortify the minds of his disciples against the severe trials they were to undergo, our blessed Lord, in the 28th verse, adds the following exhortation: "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

This passage contains a decisive proof of two very important doctrines, the existence of a soul distinct from the body, and the continuance of that soul after death (both of which, in direct opposition to this and many other passages of scripture, some late writers have dared to controvert;) and it plainly refers the apostles to the consideration of a future life, in which all their views, their hopes and fears, were to center, and by which their conduct in this world was entirely to be regulated. The worst their enemies could do to them in this life was to kill the body, which must some time or other be destroyed by age or disease. But God was able to kill the soul, which was formed for immortality, to annihilate it at once, or to condemn it to everlasting punishment. It was, therefore, of infinitely more consequence to avoid his displeasure, and to secure his approbation by performing their duty, than by shamefully deserting it to escape the infliction of the bittereft evils that their fellow creatures could bring upon them.

In conformity to this advice he tells them, "that he that endureth to the end shall be saved: and that he who loses his life for his sake in this world, shall find it in a far more exalted sense in the next*."

This was solid comfort and substantial support. But unless our Lord had given them irresistible miraculous evidence of the reality of this future reward, unless they had absolute demonstration of its certainty, it was utterly impossible that they could be so mad as to sacrifice to this expectation every thing most valuable in this life, and even life itself.

* Matth. x. 22—39.

As a ſtill further ſupport under the terrifying proſpect which our bleſſed Lord had held up to the apoſtles, he aſſures them that the providence of God would continually ſuperintend and watch over them.

"Are not two ſparrows, ſays he, ſold for a farthing, and one of them ſhall not fall to the ground without your Father; but the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not, therefore, ye are of more value than many ſparrows*."

Here we have that moſt important and comfortable doctrine of a particular Providence plainly and clearly laid down.

That he who erected the immenſe and magnificent fabric of the univerſe will continue to regard and to preſerve the work of his own hands, and maintain what is called the general order of nature, and the ordinary courſe of human affairs, is ſo conſonant to reaſon and common ſenſe, that few even of the pagans who believed the being of a God, entertained any doubt of this *general* ſuperintendence of the Deity over the worlds he has created, and the inhabitants he has placed in them. But when we deſcend from this comprehenſive view of things to the ſeveral conſtituent parts of the general ſyſtem, and to every individual of every ſpecies of animated beings diſperſed throughout the whole; when we reflect how very inconſiderable a place this globe that we inhabit holds amongſt the celeſtial bodies, how very ſmall a portion it occupies of unbounded ſpace, and how infinitely minute and inſignificant every human creature muſt appear in the vaſt maſs of created beings, we can hardly think it poſſible that the care of the Supreme Being ſhould extend to ourſelves; we cannot help fearing that we ſhall be loſt and overlooked in the immenſity of creation, and that we are objects far too ſmall and minute to fall within the ſphere of our Maker's obſervation. The more we reaſon on this ſubject, the more ground we ſhall find for theſe apprehenſions; and there is nothing, I will venture to ſay, in the whole com-

* Matth. x. 29, 30, 31.

paſs of what is called natural religion or modern philoſophy, that can in the ſmalleſt degree tend to allay or to remove theſe natural, theſe unavoidable miſgivings of the human mind.

Here then is one of thoſe many inſtances in which we can have no certainty, no ſolid ground for the ſole of our foot to ſtand upon, but in the Goſpel of Chriſt. Our reaſon, though ſent out ever ſo often in ſearch of a reſting place, returns to us, like Noah's dove, when the waters covered the earth, without any token of comfort. It is ſcripture only which in this important point can give reſt unto our ſouls. There we are aſſured that every individual being, even the leaſt and moſt contemptible, even the ſparrow that is ſold for leſs than a farthing, is under the eye of the Almighty; that ſo far from man being too inconſiderable for the notice of his Maker, the minuteſt parts of his body, the very hairs of his head, are all numbered. Theſe very ſtrong inſtances are plainly choſen on purpoſe to quiet all our fears, and to baniſh from our minds every idea of our being too ſmall and inſignificant for the care and protection of the Almighty.

This moſt conſolatory doctrine of a particular Providence, of a Providence which watches over every individual of the human race, places the Chriſtian in a ſituation totally different from that of every one who diſbelieves revelation. The latter muſt conceive himſelf under no other government but that of chance or fortune, and of courſe muſt conſider the whole happineſs of his life as expoſed every moment to the mercy of the next accident that may befal him. The true believer on the contrary has the moſt perfect conviction that he is conſtantly under the protection of an almighty and merciful God, in whom he lives, and moves, and has his being; "whoſe eyes are over the righteous, and whoſe ears are open to their prayers;" that therefore if he lives, ſo as to merit the approbation of his heavenly Father, he has every reaſon to hope for ſuch a degree of happineſs, even here, as the imperfection of human nature will admit; and he is certain that nothing *dreadful* can befal him without the know-

ledge and permiſſion of his great Protector, who will even in that caſe ſupport him under it, and render it ultimately conducive to his good.

The next paſſage in this chapter to which I ſhall direct your attention, is that very remarkable one which has furniſhed the enemies of Chriſtianity with ſo much pretence for obloquy and invective againſt the Goſpel, and has been the ſource of no ſmall uneaſineſs and diſmay to ſome of its warmeſt friends. The paſſage I mean is this; "Think not" (ſays our Lord) "I am come to ſend peace on earth, I came not to ſend peace but a ſword; for I am come to ſet a man at variance againſt his father, and the daughter againſt her mother, and the daughter-in-law againſt her mother-in-law, and a man's foes ſhall be thoſe of his own houſehold*."

What ſhall we ſay now (exclaims the infidel) to this extraordinary declaration? Here we have the Author of the Chriſtian religion himſelf openly and explicitly avowing that he came to ſend a ſword upon earth, *to diſſolve* all the tender endearing ties of domeſtic affection, to ſet the neareſt relations at variance, and to arm them with inextinguiſhable rage and rancor againſt each other.

But can this be really the ſenſe of our Saviour's words? Can HE mean to denounce war and deſtruction to the human ſpecies? HE whoſe whole religion breathes nothing but peace, gentleneſs, kindneſs, and compaſſion, to every human being; who made charity or the love of man the great characteriſtic mark of his religion: who expreſsly forbade his diſciples "to call down fire from heaven" on thoſe who had inſulted them; who in this very chapter commanded them "to be harmleſs as doves; and declared that he came not to deſtroy men's lives, but to ſave them†?" It is evidently impoſſible that the author of ſuch precepts and ſuch profeſſions could mean literally to ſpread ruin and deſolation over the earth. What then was his meaning? It was to obviate an error into which the apoſtles would be very apt to fall, and which proba-

* Matth. x. 34, 35, 36. † Matth. x. 16. Luke ix. 56.

bly our Saviour ſaw riſing in their minds. You tell us (they perhaps ſaid within themſelves,) you tell us that we ſhall be perſecuted, tormented, and put to death, and that, even by thoſe who are moſt nearly connected with us. But how is this poſſible? How can all this happen under your protection, under the reign of the Meſſiah, THE PRINCE OF PEACE, under whom we have always been given to expect tranquility, repoſe, and happineſs? To this ſuppoſed reaſoning our Saviour anſwers; You are miſtaken in your idea of that peace, which I, your Meſſiah, am to give you. It is not immediate temporal peace, but peace in a ſpiritual ſenſe, peace in your own minds, and peace with God. Ultimately indeed I ſhall eſtabliſh peace in *every* ſenſe of the word, and "ſhall make wars to to ceaſe in all the world*;" but at preſent, and indeed for many years to come, I ſhall not bring peace but a ſword upon earth. The promulgation of my religion will be productive of much diſſenſion, cruelty, and perſecution, not only to you, but to all thoſe who for many ages afterwards ſhall preach the Goſpel in purity and truth. The true *cauſe* of this will be the wickedneſs and the ferocious paſſions of men; but the occaſion and the *pretence* for it will be the holy religion which you are to promulgate. In this ſenſe, and in this only, it is that I may be ſaid to bring a ſword upon earth; but they who *really* bring it, are the open enemies or pretended friends of the Goſpel.

Still it is ſaid by the adverſaries of our faith, that however theſe words may be interpreted, the fact is, that Chriſtians themſelves have brought a ſword, and a moſt deſtructive ſword, upon earth: that they have perſecuted one another with inconceivable rancor and fury; and that their diſſenſions have produced more bloodſhed, miſery, and deſolation, among mankind, than all the other wars of contending nations put together.

To this I anſwer in the firſt place, that the charge as here ſtated is not true. It is not true that wars of religion have been more frequent and more ſanguinary than any

* Pſalm xlvi. 9.

others. On the contrary, it may be proved in the clearest manner, from the most authentic facts, that by far the greatest number of wars, as well as the longest, most extensive, and most destructive, have been owing to causes purely political, and those too sometimes of the most trivial nature. And if we can allow men to harass and destroy one another for a mere point of honor, or a few acres of land, why should we think it strange to see them defending, with the same heat and bitterness, what they conceive to be the most essential requisite to happiness both here and hereafter?

2dly. I must observe, that a very large part of those animosities, wars, and massacres, which have been usually stiled *religious*, and with the entire guilt of which Christianity has been very unjustly loaded, have been altogether, or at least in a great measure, owing to causes of a very different nature; to the ambition, the resentment, the avarice, the rapacity of princes and of conquerors, who assumed the mask of religion to veil their real purposes, and who pretended to fight in the cause of God and *his* church, when they had in reality nothing else in view than to advance their power or extend their dominions. All history is full of instances of this kind.

3dly. It should be remembered, that the wildest excesses of religious persecution did not take place till the world was overrun with barbarity, ignorance, bigotry, and superstition; till military ideas predominated in every thing, in the form of government, in the temper of the laws, in the tenure of lands, in the administration of justice itself; and till the Scriptures were shut up in a foreign tongue, and were therefore unknown to the people. It was not therefore from the Gospel, but from a total *ignorance* of the Gospel, from a total perversion of its true temper, genius, and spirit, that these excesses and enormities arose.

4thly. That this is the real truth of the case appears demonstrably from this circumstance, that when after the reformation the Scriptures were translated into the several vernacular languages of Europe, and the real nature of

the Chriſtian revelation became of courſe more generally known, the violence of perſecution began to abate; and as the ſacred writings were more and more ſtudied, and their true ſenſe better underſtood, the baneful ſpirit of intolerance loſt ground every day, and the divine principle of Chriſtian charity and benevolence has been continually gaining freſh ſtrength; till at length, at the preſent moment, perſecution by Chriſtians on the ſcore of religion only has almoſt entirely vaniſhed from the face of the earth; and we may venture to indulge the hope, that wars of religion, ſtrictly ſo called, will be heard of no more.

I now proceed to explain the verſes immediately following that which we have been juſt conſidering.

"I am come, ſays our Lord, to ſet a man at variance againſt his father, and the daughter againſt her mother, and the daughter-in-law againſt her mother-in-law, and a man's foes ſhall be thoſe of his own houſehold."

This paſſage is a clear proof that the calamities and miſeries predicted in the preceding verſe relate primarily and principally to the apoſtles themſelves, becauſe theſe words are almoſt a repetition of what our Lord applied to *them* in the 27th verſe, "The brother ſhall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child; and the children ſhall riſe up againſt their parents, and cauſe them to be put to death*."

Now as theſe cruelties were inflicted on the apoſtles, not by believers, but by unbelieving Jews and heathens, that is, by the enemies of the Goſpel, it is evident, that when our Saviour ſays he came to ſet a man at variance againſt his father, and ſo on, he meant only to ſay, that the religion which he taught would meet with the moſt violent oppoſition from the world, and would expoſe his apoſtles and diſciples to the moſt unjuſt and inhuman treatment, even ſometimes from their neareſt relations.

Our Lord then goes on to ſay, "He that loveth father and mother more than me, is not worthy of me †." This

* Matth. x. 21. † Matth. x. 37.

has an evident reference to the two preceding verſes; in which our Lord had declared, that amidſt the various miſeries that would be occaſioned by the wickedneſs and barbarity of thoſe who rejected and reſiſted the Chriſtian religion, diſſentions would ariſe even among thoſe moſt nearly connected with each other, and the true Chriſtian would ſometimes find his bittereſt enemies even in the boſom of his own family. A father would perhaps perſecute his own ſon, and a mother her daughter, on account of her religious opinions, and would by argument and by influence endeavor to perſuade, or by authority and power to compel them to abjure their faith. In caſes ſuch as theſe our Lord here intimates, that when the choice is between renouncing our neareſt relations and renouncing our religion, we muſt not heſitate a moment what part we are to take; we muſt, to obey God rather than man, we muſt give up all and follow Chriſt. "He that loveth father and mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth ſon and daughter more than me, is not worthy of me*." That is evidently when the neareſt and deareſt relations come in competition with our belief in Chriſt, and obedience to his commands, our affection for them and deference to their opinions muſt give place to love for our Redeemer and attachment to our Maker.

In the parallel place of St. Luke this precept is expreſſed in ſtill ſtronger terms: "If any man come to me, and *hate* not his father and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and ſiſters, yea, and his own life alſo, he cannot be my diſciple†."

The mind of the reader is at the firſt view apt to revolt at the ſeeming harſhneſs of this declaration; but it is evidently nothing more than a bolder and more figurative way (according to a well-known Hebrew idiom) of conveying the very ſame ſentiment that St. Matthew clothes in gentler language. It means nothing more than that we ought to entertain a more ardent affection for our heavenly Father than for our earthly parents; and that his com-

* Acts, v. 29. † Luke, xiv. 26.

mands must be preferred to theirs whenever they happen to interfere. And in the same manner several other apparently severe injunctions in the Gospel are to be explained and mitigated by others of the same import, but more perspicuously and more mildly expressed.

But we are not only enjoined to love Christ and his religion more than our nearest relations, where they happen to interfere, but even more than our own life. "He that taketh not his cross and followeth after me, is not worthy of me*." This plainly alludes to the custom of persons who were going to be crucified bearing their own cross; and the literal and primary meaning is, that we should be ready, if called upon, to undergo even that painful and ignominious death, rather than renounce our faith. This indeed is a most severe trial; but it is a trial which it is not only our duty but our interest to undergo, if reduced to the necessity either of forfeiting our life, or renouncing our allegiance to Christ. For we are told here by our Lord himself, that "he who findeth his life, shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for his sake shall find it†." That is, whoever to save his life apostatizes from his faith, shall be punished with the loss of that life which alone deserves the name, life everlasting. But he who sacrifices his life to his religion in this world, shall be rewarded with eternal life in the world to come.

* Matth. x. 38. † Ibid. 39

LECTURE X.

MATTHEW xii.

THE next chapter which ſeems more peculiarly to deſerve our attention, and to require ſome explanation and illuſtration, is the 12th chapter of St. Matthew.

It begins thus: "At that time Jeſus went on the ſabbath-day through the corn, and his diſciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn and to eat. But when the Phariſees ſaw it, they ſaid unto him, behold thy diſciples do that which is not lawful to do on the ſabbath-day. But he ſaid unto them, have ye not read what David did when he was an hungred, and they that were with him? How he entered into the houſe of God, and did eat the ſhew-bread, which it was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the prieſts? Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the ſabbath-day the prieſts in the temple profane the ſabbath, and are blameleſs? But I ſay unto you, that in this place is one greater than the temple. But if ye had known what this meaneth, *I will have mercy and not ſacrifice*, ye would not have condemned the guiltleſs; for the Son of man is Lord even of the ſabbath-day. And when he was departed thence, he went into the ſynagogue. And there was a man which had his hand withered; and they aſked him, ſaying, is it lawful to heal on the ſabbath-day? that they might accuſe him. And he ſaid unto them what man ſhall there be among you that ſhall have one ſheep, and if it fall into a pit on the ſabbath-day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a ſheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the ſabbath-day. Then ſaith he to the man, ſtretch forth thine hand. And he ſtretched it forth, and it was reſtored whole like the other."

Although here are two different tranſactions related, that of plucking the ears of corn, and healing the withered hand, yet as they are cloſely connected together by the evangeliſt, and relate to the ſame ſubject, the obſervation of the ſabbath, I have recited the whole paſſage comprehending both theſe incidents at length, that you might have before you at one view all that our Saviour has ſaid on this important branch of our duty, and that we might fully underſtand what kind of *reſt* it is that our bleſſed Lord judged to be neceſſary on the Jewiſh ſabbath, and what limitations and exceptions to it he admitted; from whence we may form ſome judgment what our own duty is on that holy day which we juſtly call THE LORD'S DAY, and which muſt be conſidered as the Chriſtian ſabbath.

From this paſſage, as well as from many others, it appears, that the Jews had their eyes conſtantly fixed on Jeſus and his followers, and moſt anxiouſly ſought out for opportunities of faſtening ſome guilt upon them. It appears alſo that they were extremely unfortunate in theſe attempts, and compelled (as in the preſent inſtance) to have recourſe to the ſilliеſt and moſt trivial charges; and even theſe turned out to be perfectly unfounded. From whence I think we may fairly draw this inference, that the character and conduct of our Lord and his diſciples were perfectly blameleſs; ſince with all the induſtry of ſo many ſharp-ſighted obſervers, ſo extremely well diſpoſed to diſcover guilt or to make it, they could find no real fault in him.

The pretence on this occaſion was, that the diſciples, by plucking a few ears of corn and eating them as they paſſed through a corn-field on the ſabbath day, had violated the reſt of that holy day, and thus tranſgreſſed the Moſaical law. But to this our Lord replied, that in caſes of extreme neceſſity the ſeverity of that law might be diſpenſed with and relaxed. As a proof of this, he appealed firſt to the example of David, the man after God's own heart, who (as may be ſeen in 1 Samuel, xxi. 6.) when he and his men were reduced to great ſtreights for want of food, aſked and obtained from Ahimelech the

prieſt a part of the conſecrated bread which had been taken from the altar, and which it was not lawful for any but the prieſts to eat. The other inſtance he adduced, was that of the prieſts themſelves, who in the neceſſary ſervice of the temple on the ſabbath-day were obliged to work with their own hands, by lighting the fires, killing the victims, offering up the ſacrifices, &c. This in any other perſons would have been conſidered as profanations of the ſabbath; but in the prieſts who were engaged in the duties of religion it was not.

Theſe arguments addreſſed to a Jew were in themſelves unanſwerable; becauſe they appealed to the practice of perſons whom the Jews held ſacred, and whoſe conduct they durſt not condemn. But they went ſtill further than this; they went to eſtabliſh this general principle, that there might be obligations of a force ſuperior even to the law of Moſes, and to which it ought in certain caſes to give way; as in the firſt inſtance to the preſſing demands of neceſſity, in the other to the ſervices of the temple.

If then in theſe caſes the law might be diſpenſed with, ſtill more might it be overruled by a power paramount to every other power, by him who was far greater and holier than the temple itſelf, who was *Lord even of the ſabbath*, who was indeed ſupreme Lord over all, and might, therefore authorize his diſciples, in a caſe of real urgency, to depart a little from the rigor of the ſabbatical reſt.

It ſhould be obſerved here, that where St. Matthew ſays, "the Son of man is Lord even of the ſabbath-day;" St. Mark, in the parallel place, expreſſes himſelf thus: "The ſabbath was made for man, and not man for the ſabbath." That is, the ſabbath was given to man for his *benefit*, for the improvement of his ſoul, as well as for the reſt of his body; and the latter, when neceſſary, muſt be ſacrificed to the former. For man was not made for the ſabbath; was not made to be a ſlave to it, to be ſo ſervilely bound down to the ſtrict phariſaical obſervance of it, as to loſe by that rigorous adherence to the letter, opportunities of doing eſſential ſervice to himſelf and his fellow creatures.

To this irreſiſtible force of reaſoning our bleſſed Lord adds another argument of conſiderable weight: "If ye had known, ſays he, what this meaneth, *I will have mercy, and not ſacrifice*, ye would not have condemned the guiltleſs." The quotation is from the prophet Hoſea; the words are ſuppoſed to be thoſe of God himſelf; and the meaning is, according to a well-known Jewiſh idiom, *I prefer mercy to ſacrifice*; that is, when any ceremonial inſtitution interferes with the execution of any charitable or pious deſign, the former muſt give place to the latter; as in the preſent inſtance, a ſtrict obſervance of the ſabbath muſt not be ſuffered to deprive my diſciples of that refreſhment which is neceſſary to ſupport them under the fatigue of following me, and diſpending to mankind the bleſſings of the goſpel. We ſee then with what ſuperſtitious rigor the Jews adhered to the letter of their law reſpecting the Jewiſh ſabbath; and with what ſuperior wiſdom and dignity our Lord endeavored to raiſe their minds above ſuch trivial things to the true ſpirit of it, to the life and ſoul of religion.

The fault however here reproved and corrected is not one into which we of this country are likely to fall, nor is there any need to warn us againſt imitating the Jews in this inſtance. There is no danger that we ſhould carry the obſervance of *our* ſabbath too far, or that we ſhould be too ſcrupulouſly nice in avoiding every the minuteſt infringement of the reſt and ſanctity of that holy day.—The bent and tendency of the preſent times is too evidently to a contrary extreme, to an exceſſive relaxation inſtead of an exceſſive ſtrictneſs in the regard ſhewn to the Lord's day. I am not now ſpeaking of the *religious* duties appropriated to the Lord's day, for theſe are not now before us, but ſolely of the *reſt*, the *repoſe* which it requires.—This reſt is plainly infringed, whenever the lower claſſes of people continue their ordinary occupations on the ſabbath, and whenever the higher employ their ſervants and their cattle on this day in needleſs labor. This, however, we ſee too frequently done, more particularly by *ſelecting* Sunday as a day for travelling, for taking long journies, which might as well be performed at any other time.—

This is a direct violation of the fourth commandment, which expreſsly gives the ſabbath as a day of reſt to our ſervants and our cattle.

This temporary ſuſpenſion of labor, this refreſhment and relief from inceſſant toil, is moſt graciouſly allowed even to the brute creation, by the great Governor of the univerſe, whoſe mercy extends over *all* his works. It is the boon of heaven itſelf. It is a ſmall drop of comfort thrown into their cup of miſery; and to wreſt from them this only privilege, this ſweeteſt conſolation of their wretched exiſtence, is a degree of inhumanity for which there wants a name; and of which few people I am perſuaded, if they could be brought to reflect ſeriouſly upon it, would ever be guilty.

Theſe profanations of the ſabbath are however ſometimes defended on the ground of the very paſſage we have been juſt conſidering. It is alledged, that as our Lord here reproves the Jews for too rigorous an attention to the reſt of the ſabbath, it conveys an intimation that we ought not to be too exact and ſcrupulous in that reſpect; and that many things may in fact be allowable which timid minds may conſider as unlawful. But it ſhould be obſerved, that Jeſus condemns nothing in the conduct of the Jews but what was plainly abſurd and ſuperſtitious; and he allows of no exceptions to that reſt from labor which they obſerved on the ſabbath, except ſimply works of *neceſſity* and *charity*; ſuch for inſtance as thoſe very caſes which gave occaſion to the converſation in this chapter between Chriſt and the Jews, that of the diſciples plucking the ears of corn on the ſabbath-day to ſatisfy their hunger, and that of our Saviour's reſtoring the withered hand. It is lawful, in ſhort, as our Saviour expreſſes it, to *do well* on the ſabbath-day; to preſerve ourſelves, and to benefit our fellow creatures. Thus far then we may go, but no farther. In other reſpects, the *reſt* of the Lord's day is to be obſerved; and thoſe very exceptions which our Saviour makes are a proof, that in every other caſe he approves and ſanctions the duty of reſting on the ſabbath-day. It is alſo remarkable, that our own laws, grounding themſelves no doubt on this

declaration of Chriſt, make the ſame exceptions to the reſt of the ſabbath that he does; they allow works of neceſſity and charity, but no others*. To theſe, therefore, we ought to confine ourſelves as nearly as may be; and with theſe exceptions, and theſe only, conſecrate the ſabbath as a *holy reſt unto the Lord.*

This reſt the Almighty enjoined, not, as is ſometimes pretended, to the Jews only, but to all mankind. For even immediately after the great work of creation was finiſhed, we are told, "that God ended his work that he had made, and he reſted on the ſeventh day from all the work which he had made; and God bleſſed the ſeventh day, and ſanctified it; becauſe that in it he had reſted from all his work which God created and made†." It is evident, therefore, that the ſeventh day was to be a day of reſt *to all mankind*, in memory of God having on that day finiſhed his great work of creation; and this ſeventh day, after our Lord's reſurrection, was changed by his apoſtles to the *firſt* day of the week, on which our Lord roſe *from* the dead, and reſted from *his* labors; ſo that the reſt of this day is now commemorative of both theſe important events, the creation and the reſurrection.

I now proceed to conſider the conſequences of this converſation between our Lord and the Phariſees on the ſubject of the ſabbath. One ſhould have expected that ſo wiſe and rational an explanation of the law reſpecting that day, releaſing men from the ſenſeleſs ſeverities impoſed upon them by the ſervile fears of ſuperſtition, but at the ſame time requiring all that reſpite from labor which is really conducive to the glory of God and the happineſs of man; one ſhould have expected, I ſay, that ſuch wiſdom and ſuch benevolence as this would have triumphed over even phariſaical obſtinacy, and extorted the admiration and applauſe of his hearers. But ſtubborn prejudices, and deep-rooted malignity, are not ſo eaſily ſubdued. For ſee what actually followed. "The Phariſees went out," ſays the evangeliſt, "and held a council how they might deſtroy him." Deſtroy him! for what? Why for giving eaſe to

* See the Statute of 29 C. 2, c. 7. † Gen. ii. 2, 3.

timid minds and ſcrupulous conſciences, and for reſtoring the withered hand of a poor decrepid man. And were theſe deeds that deſerved deſtruction? Would it not rather have been the juſt reward of thoſe inhuman wretches who were capable of conceiving ſo execrable a project: and would not our Saviour have been juſtified in calling down fire from heaven, as he eaſily might, to conſume them? But his heart abhorred the thought. He purſued a directly oppoſite conduct; and inſtead of inflicting upon them a puniſhment which might have deſtroyed them, he choſe to ſet them an example that might amend them. He choſe to ſhew them the difference between their temper and his own, between thoſe malignant vindictive paſſions which governed *them*, and the mild, gentle, conciliating diſpoſition which his religion inſpired; between the ſpirit of the world, in ſhort, and the ſpirit of the Goſpel. He withdrew himſelf ſilently and quietly from them; and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all; and, to avoid all irritation and all conteſt, he charged them that they ſhould not make him known. "Thus was fulfilled," ſays the evangeliſt, that which was ſpoken by Eſaias the prophet, ſaying, "Behold my ſervant whom I have choſen; my beloved, in whom my ſoul is well pleaſed. I will put my ſpirit upon him, and he ſhall ſhew judgment to the Gentiles. He ſhall not ſtrive nor cry; neither ſhall any man hear his voice in the ſtreets. A bruiſed reed ſhall he not break, and ſmoking flax ſhall he not quench, till he ſend forth judgment unto victory*." A moſt ſublime paſſage; which may thus be paraphraſed. Behold my ſervant whom I have choſen, my beloved, in whom my ſoul is well pleaſed! I will put my ſpirit upon him, and he ſhall teach true religion, not only to the people of Iſrael, but to the heathens alſo; and this he ſhall do with the utmoſt tenderneſs, mildneſs, and meekneſs, without contention and noiſe, without tumult and diſturbance. A bruiſed reed ſhall he not break; he ſhall not bear hard upon a wounded and contrite, and truly humble and penitent heart, bowed down with a ſenſe of its infirmities. And ſmoking flax ſhall he not quench; the

* Iſaiah xlii. 1—3.

faintest spark of returning virtue he will not extinguish by severity; but will cherish and encourage the one, and will raise and animate and enliven the other; till by these gentle conciliating means he shall have triumphed over the wickedness and malevolence of his enemies, and completely established his religion throughout the world. What an amiable picture is here given us of the divine Author of our faith! and how exactly does this prophetic description correspond to the whole tenor of his conduct in the propagation of his religion!

The next remarkable occurrences which present themselves in this chapter are those of our Saviour casting a devil out of a man that was both blind and dumb; the reflections which the Pharisees threw upon him in consequence of this miracle, and the effectual manner in which he silenced them, and repelled their calumny.

The passage is as follows: "Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind and dumb, and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, is not this the Son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, this fellow doth not cast out devils but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils. And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand. And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself, how shall then his kingdom stand?"

This passage affords room for a variety of observation.

In the first place, it is evident from this, as well as from many other passages of holy writ, that at the time when our Saviour promulged his religion, there was a calamity incident to the human race, of which at present we know nothing, and that is, the possession of their bodies by evil spirits or devils (as they are usually called in scripture) which occasioned great torments to the unhappy sufferers, and often deprived them both of their sight and hearing, as in the present instance. Such possessions having long

ſince caſed, they have appeared to ſeveral learned men ſo incredible, that they have been led to deny that they ever exiſted, and to maintain that they were only diſeaſes of a violent and terrifying nature, attended with convulſive or epileptic fits; that this ſort of diſeaſe was aſcribed by the Jews to the operation of evil ſpirits; and that our Saviour, in compliance with their prejudices, treated them as caſes of real poſſeſſion, and pretended to caſt out devils, when in fact, he only cured the diſorder with which the patient was afflicted.

This opinion is ſupported by great names; but however great and reſpectable they may be it appears to me utterly indefenſible.

Every expreſſion that our Lord makes uſe of with reſpect to theſe demoniacs plainly ſuppoſes them to be really poſſeſſed; and it is not eaſy to aſſign any admiſſible reaſon why he ſhould treat them as ſuch, if they were not ſo, and why he ſhould not correct inſtead of countenancing ſo groſs an error; as ſuch a conduct could anſwer no one good purpoſe, and ſeems hard to reconcile with his own uniform fairneſs and ſincerity of mind. To have done it to magnify his own power in caſting out the evil ſpirits, would have been, to all appearance, a very needleſs expedient; becauſe the immediate removal of a natural diſeaſe (if it was one) would have been an equal proof of his divine power. But beſides this, there is every where a plain diſtinction made between common diſeaſes and demoniacal poſſeſſions; which ſhews that they were totally different things. In the fourth chapter of this Goſpel, where the very firſt mention is made of theſe poſſeſſions, it is ſaid, that our Lord's fame went throughout all Syria, and they brought unto him all ſick people that were taken with divers diſeaſes and torments, and thoſe which were poſſeſſed with devils, and he healed them. Here you ſee thoſe that were taken with divers diſeaſes and torments, and thoſe poſſeſſed with devils, are mentioned as diſtinct and ſeparate perſons; a plain proof that the demoniacal poſſeſſions were not natural diſeaſes; and the very ſame diſtinction is made in ſeveral other paſſages of holy writ.

There can be no doubt, therefore, that the demoniacs were persons really possessed with evil spirits; and although it may seem strange to us, yet we find from Josephus, and other historians, that it was in those times no uncommon case. In fact, it appears that about the time of our Lord's ministry, that tremendous spirit, Satan, or, as he is sometimes called in scripture, the Prince of this world, had obtained an extraordinary degree of power over the human race, inflicting upon them the cruellest pains and torments, depriving them of their senses, rendering them wretched in themselves, and terrible to all around them. To subdue this formidable and wicked being, and to destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, was one great object of our Saviour's divine mission; and it seems to have been indispensably necessary for accomplishing the redemption of mankind, that the kingdom of Satan should in the first place be destroyed, and that the sons of men should be rescued from that horrible and disgraceful state of slavery in which he had long held them enthralled. One of the first steps, therefore, that our Lord took before he entered on his ministry was, to establish his superiority over this great enemy of mankind: which he did in that memorable scene of the temptation in the wilderness; and among the earliest of his miracles recorded, is that of casting out devils from those who were possed by them. And perhaps one reason why these possessions were permitted, might be to afford our Lord an opportunity of giving the Jews a visible and ocular demonstration of his decided superiority and sovereignty over the prince of the devils, and all his agents, and of his power to subdue this great adversary of the human species. He appears indeed to have been in a state of constant hostility and warfare with this wicked spirit; and in this very passage Satan is described by our Saviour under the image of a *strong man*, whom it was necessary *to bind* before you could spoil his house, and exterminate him and his coadjutors, as Jesus was then doing. Yet so little were the Jews sensible of this enmity between Christ and Beelzebub, that on the contrary they charged them with being friends and confederates. They said, "This fellow doth not cast out devils but by Beelzebub the prince of the

devils." The anſwer of our Lord to this was deciſive and ſatisfactory to every reaſonable mind. "Every kingdom divided againſt itſelf is brought to deſolation; and every city or houſe devided againſt itſelf ſhall not ſtand. And if Satan caſt out Satan, he is divided againſt himſelf, how ſhall then his kingdom ſtand?" His argument is this: How abſurd and prepoſterous is it to ſuppoſe that Satan will act againſt himſelf, by expelling his own miniſters and agents whom he has ſent to take poſſeſſion of the minds and bodies of men, and by aſſiſting me to eſtabliſh my religion, and thereby diffuſe virtue and happineſs throughout the world, which it is *his* great object to deſtroy, and to introduce vice and miſery in their room. This muſt clearly end in his ruin, and the overthrow of his empire over mankind. It is evident then that it is not by *his* aſſiſtance, but by the power of God, that I caſt out devils; and if ſo, it is clear to demonſtration that I am commiſſioned by heaven to teach true religion to mankind.

I cannot quit this ſubject of miracles without obſerving, what a remarkable difference there is between the ſentiments of modern infidels and thoſe of the firſt enemies of the Goſpel reſpecting the miracles of Chriſt. The former aſſert, that our Saviour wrought no real miracles: that miracles are in their own nature incredible and impoſſible; and that no human teſtimony whatever can give credit to events ſo contrary to experience, and ſo repugnant to the ordinary courſe of nature. But go to thoſe unbelievers who lived in the earlieſt ages of the Goſpel, and even to thoſe who were eye-witneſſes to our Lord's miracles, and they will tell you a very different ſtory. *They* aſſert, that Jeſus *did* work miracles; they acknowledge that he did expel evil ſpirits out of thoſe that were poſſeſſed. They aſcribed the miracle indeed to the power of Beelzebub, not of God. But this we know to be abſurdity and nonſenſe. The fact of the miraculous cure they did not diſpute; and this at once eſtabliſhes the divine miſſion of our Lord. To which then of theſe two deſcriptions of infidels ſhall we give moſt credit, to thoſe who lived near eighteen hundred years after the miracles were perform-

ed, or to thoſe who ſaw them wrought with their own eyes: and though they deteſted the author of them, admitted the reality of his wonderful works?

Our Lord then, continuing his converſation with the Phariſees, addreſſes to them, in the 31ſt verſe, theſe remarkable words:

"Wherefore I ſay unto you, all manner of ſin and blaſphemy ſhall be forgiven unto men; but the blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt ſhall not be forgiven unto men. And whoſoever ſpeaketh a word againſt the Son of man, it ſhall be forgiven him; but whoſoever ſpeaketh againſt the Holy Ghoſt, it ſhall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come."

Our Lord's meaning in this obſcure and alarming paſſage ſeems to be this; there is no other ſin or blaſphemy which argues ſuch a total depravation of mind, but that it may be repented of and forgiven. Even he that ſpeaks againſt me, the Son of God, and is not convinced by my preaching, my yet be afterwards converted by the power of the Holy Ghoſt, by the miracles which he enables me and my diſciples to work, and may obtain remiſſion of his ſin. But he that ſhall obſtinately reſiſt this laſt method of conviction (that of miracles wrought before his eyes) and ſhall maliciouſly revile theſe moſt evident operations of the ſpirit of God, contrary to the reaſon of his own mind and the dictates of his own conſcience, ſuch an one has no further means left by which he may be convinced and brought to repentance, and therefore can never be forgiven.

From this interpretation, which is, I believe, generally admitted to be the true one, it appears that there is no juſt ground for the apprehenſions ſometimes entertained by pious and ſcrupulous minds, that they may *themſelves* be guilty of the ſin here declared to be unpardonable, the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt; for we ſee that it is confined ſolely and excluſively to the caſe before us, that is to the crime of which the Phariſees had juſt been guilty, the crime of attributing thoſe miracles to the agency of evil ſpirits, which were plainly wrought by the ſpirit of God, and which they ſaw with their own eyes.

What confirms this interpretation is, that this crime is here called, not as is generally ſuppoſed, the *ſin* againſt Holy Ghoſt, but *blaſphemy* againſt the Holy Ghoſt, which evidently refers not to *actions* but to *words*; not to any thing *done* but to ſomething *ſaid* againſt the Holy Ghoſt. This being the caſe, it is clear that as miracles have long ſince ceaſed, and this blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt relates ſolely to thoſe who ſaw miracles performed with their own eyes, it is impoſſible for any one in theſe times to be literally guilty of this impious and unpardonable kind of blaſphemy in its full extent.

Our Lord then addreſſes himſelf more directly to the authors of this ſpiteful calumny: "Either make the tree good and his fruit good, or elſe make the tree corrupt and his fruit corrupt; for the tree is known by its fruit:" that is, be uniform and conſiſtent with yourſelves. If you pretend to holineſs and ſincerity of heart, ſuffer not your mouths to utter theſe blaſphemies; or if you perſiſt in ſuch behavior, lay aſide all claim to religion, with which this obſtinate malice is as inconſiſtent, as it is for a tree not to diſcover its nature by the quality of the fruit it produces. He then adds, "O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, ſpeak good things; for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth ſpeaketh. A good man, out of the good treaſure of his heart, bringeth forth good things; and an evil man, out of the evil treaſure of his heart, bringeth forth evil things." The import of which words is this: But it is impoſſible that *you* ſhould ſpeak otherwiſe than evil. You are a perverſe and malicious generation, and the thoughts of men's hearts will of courſe ſhew themſelves by their words. They ariſe immediately from the fund within, and will neceſſarily diſcover whether it be good or bad.

Then follows another very remarkable declaration of our Lord's in the 36th verſe: "I ſay unto you, that every idle word that men ſhall ſpeak, they ſhall give account thereof in the day of judgment." From hence ſome have imagined, that at the day of judgment we ſhall be called to an account, and puniſhed for every idle and unprofita-

ble, every trifling and ludicrous word that we have ever uttered in the gaiety of the heart during the whole courſe of our lives. If this be the caſe, how hard is it, will the enemies of the Goſpel ſay, in the Author of your religion, to exact from you what is utterly inconſiſtent with the infirmities of human nature, and which muſt completely deſtroy all the freedom, all the eaſe, all the cheerfulneſs, all the comforts of ſocial converſe, and render it neceſſary for every man that hopes to be ſaved to ſeclude himſelf from ſociety, and like the once celebrated fathers of the order of La Trappe, impoſe upon themſelves an everlaſting ſilence! That this muſt be the conſequence of the ſentence here pronounced by our Lord, if it is to be underſtood in that ſtrict, literal, and rigorous ſenſe which has juſt been ſtated, and which at the firſt view the words ſeem to import, cannot be denied; and therefore we may fairly conclude, that it is not the true meaning of the paſſage in queſtion; becauſe we know that we do not ſerve a hard maſter, who requires more from us than our ſtrength will bear; but one who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and who has declared, that "his yoke is eaſy, and his burthen light."

In order then to ſet this text of ſcripture in its true *light*, we muſt look back to what had juſt paſſed; we muſt remember that the Phariſees had a little before reproached our Lord with having caſt out devils through Beelzebub the prince of the devils; and it is *this* calumny that he alludes to in the words before us; for they are a continuation of that very ſame converſation which he was holding with the Jews. Now the words made uſe of by the Phariſees in the above mentioned charge are not merely idle, or fooliſh, or trifling words, they are in the higheſt degree malevolent, falſe, and wicked; they conſtitute one of the groſſeſt, moſt deteſtable, and moſt infamous calumnies that ever was uttered by man. Conſequently by *idle* words our Saviour plainly meant, falſe, lying, and malicious words, ſuch as thoſe which the Phariſees had a few minutes before applied to *him*.

In confirmation of this it ſhould be obſerved, that the language then ſpoken by the Jews was not their primitive

tongue, but one mixed and made up of the dialects and idioms of the several nations that surrounded them, particularly of the Chaldeans, Syrians, and Arabians. In this our Saviour delivered all his instructions, and held all his discourses. In this (as some learned men think) St. Matthew originally wrote his Gospel for the use of the Jewish converts: and it has been remarked, that in almost all the languages of which this miscellaneous one is made up, by idle or unprofitable words are meant, false, lying, malicious, and scandulous calumnies.

But though in the passage before us the phrase of *idle words* refers more immediately to the malignant calumny of the Pharisees against Jesus; yet it certainly includes all false, slanderous, and vindictive accusations of our neighbor; all discourse which is in any respect injurious to God or man, which is contrary to truth, to decency, and evangelical purity of heart. All conversation of this sort is plainly inconsistent with the sanctity of our religion, and must of course subject us to God's displeasure here, and his judgments hereafter. And even in the literal and most obvious sense of *idle words*, though we are not excluded from the innocent cheerfulness of social converse, yet we must beware of giving way too much to trifling, foolish, unprofitable and unmeaning talk. Even this, when carried to excess, becomes in some degree criminal; it produces, or at least increases a frivolous turn of mind; unfits us for the discharge of any thing manly and serious; and indicates a degree of levity and thoughtlessness not very consistent with a just sense of those important interests, which as candidates for heaven we should have constantly present to our thoughts, nor suitable to those awful prospects into eternity which the Christian revelation opens to our view, and which ought to make the most serious impressions on every sincere believer in the Gospel of Christ.

LECTURE XI.

MATTHEW xiii.

WE are now arrived at the thirteenth chapter of St. Matthew, in which our bleſſed Lord introduces a new mode of conveying his inſtructions to the people. Hitherto he had confined himſelf entirely to the plain didactic method, of which his ſermon on the mount is a large and noble ſpecimen. But his diſcourſes now aſſume a different ſhape, and he begins in this chapter, for the firſt time, to addreſs his hearers in parables. "The ſame day, ſays the evangeliſt, went Jeſus out of the houſe, and ſat by the ſea-ſide; and great multitudes were gathered together unto him, ſo that he went into a ſhip and ſate; and the whole multitude ſtood on the ſhore, and he ſpake many things unto them in *parables*."

The word parable is ſometimes uſed in ſcripture in a large and general ſenſe, and applied to ſhort ſententious ſayings, maxims, or aphoriſms, expreſſed in a figurative, proverbial, or even poetical manner.

But in its ſtrict and appropriate meaning, eſpecially as applied to our Saviour's parables, it ſignifies a ſhort narrative of ſome event or fact, real or fictitious, in which a continued compariſon is carried on between ſenſible and ſpiritual objects; and under this ſimilitude ſome important doctrine, moral or religious, is conveyed and enforced.

This mode of inſtruction has many advantages over every other, more particularly in recommending virtue, or reproving vice.

1. In the firſt place, when divine and ſpiritual things are repreſented by objects well known and familiar to us,

ſuch as preſent themſelves perpetually to our obſervation, in the common occurrences of life, they are much more eaſily comprehended, eſpecially by rude and uncultivated minds (that is, by the great bulk of mankind) than if they were propoſed in their original form.

2. In all ages of the world there is nothing with which mankind hath been ſo much delighted as with thoſe little fictitious ſtories, which go under the name of fables or apologues among the ancient heathens, and of parables in the ſacred writings. It is found by experience, that this ſort of compoſition is better calculated to command attention, to captivate the imagination, to affect the heart, and to make deeper and more laſting impreſſions on the memory, than the moſt ingenious and moſt elegant diſcourſes that the wit of man is capable of producing.

3. The very obſcurity in which parables are ſometimes involved, has the effect of exciting a greater degree of curioſity and intereſt, and of urging the mind to a more vigorous exertion of its faculties and powers, than any other mode of inſtruction. There is ſomething for the underſtanding to work upon; and when the concealed meaning is at length elicited, we are apt to value ourſelves on the diſcovery as the effect of our own penetration and diſcernment, and for that very reaſon to pay more regard to the moral it conveys.

4. When the mind is under the influence of ſtrong prejudices, of violent paſſions, or inveterate habits, and when under theſe circumſtances it becomes neceſſary to rectify error, to diſſipate deluſion, to reprove ſin, and bring the offender to a ſenſe of his danger and his guilt; there is no way in which this difficult taſk can be ſo well executed, and the painful truths that *muſt* be told ſo ſucceſsfully inſinuated into the mind, as by diſguiſing them under the veil of a well-wrought and intereſting parable.

This obſervation cannot be better illuſtrated than by referring to two parables, one in the New Teſtament, the other in the Old, which will amply confirm the truth, and unfold the meaning of the preceding remarks.

The first of these which I allude to is the celebrated parable of the good Samaritan.

The Jews, as we learn from our Lord himself, had established it as a maxim that they were to love their neighbor and to hate their enemy*; and as they considered none as their neighbors but their own countrymen; the consequence was, that they imagined themselves at liberty to hate all the rest of the world; a liberty which they indulged without reserve, and against none with more bitterness than the contiguous nation of the Samaritans. When, therefore, the lawyer in the Gospel asked our Lord, who was his neighbor? had Christ attempted to prove to him *by argument* that he was to consider all mankind, even his enemies even the Samaritans, as his neighbors, the lawyer would have treated his answer with contempt and disdain; all his native prejudices and absurd traditions would have risen up in arms against so offensive a doctrine; nor would all the eloquence in the world, not even the divine eloquence of the Son of God himself, have been able to subdue the deep-rooted prepossessions of the obstinate Jew.

Jesus therefore, well knowing the impossibility of convincing the lawyer by any thing *he* could say, determined to make the man convince himself, and correct his own error. With this view he relates to him the parable of the Jewish traveller, who fell among robbers, was stripped and wounded, and left half dead upon the spot; and though passed by with unfeeling indifference and neglect by his own countrymen, was at length relieved and restored to health by a compassionate Samaritan. He then asks the lawyer, who was neighbor to this distressed traveller? It was impossible for the lawyer not to answer, as he did (not foreseeing the consequence) *He that showed mercy to him*; that is, the Samaritan. Here then he at once cut up his own absurd opinion by the roots. For if the Samaritans, whom of all others the Jews most hated, were, in the true and substantial sense of the word, their *neighbors*, they were bound by their own law, by their own

* Matth. v. 43.

traditions, and by this man's own confeſſion, to love and to aſſiſt them as ſuch. The concluſion was therefore, *Go and do thou likewiſe.*

This then affords a ſtriking proof of the efficacy of parable in correcting ſtrong prejudices and erroneous opinions. But there is another thing ſtill more difficult to be ſubdued, and that is, inveterate wickedneſs and hardened guilt. But this too was made to give way and humble itſelf in the duſt by the force of parable. I mean that of Nathan.

There ſeems reaſon to believe that King David, after he had committed the complicated crime of adultery and murder, had by ſome means or other contrived to lull his conſcience to ſleep, and to ſuppreſs the riſings of any painful reflection in his mind. This appears almoſt incredible, yet ſo the fact ſeems to have been; and it ſhews in the ſtrongeſt light the extreme deceitfulneſs of ſin, its aſtoniſhing power over the mind of man, and the inveterate depravity of the human heart. When we ſee a man who had perpetrated ſuch atrocious deeds, totally inſenſible of his guilt, and not diſcovering the ſlighteſt reſemblance to his own caſe in the affecting and awakening ſtory which the prophet related, it affords a ſtriking and a melancholy proof what human nature is when left to itſelf even in the beſt of men; even in thoſe who, like King David, are, in the general tenor of their life, actuated by right principles, and even animated (as he evidently was) with the warmeſt ſentiments of piety and devotion. And it demonſtrates in the cleareſt manner the abſolute neceſſity of that help from above in the diſcharge of our duty, which the Chriſtian revelation holds out to us, and which men of the world are ſo apt to deſpiſe and deride as a weak deluſion and fanatical imagination; I mean the divine influences of the Holy Spirit: without which there is not a ſingle individual here preſent, however highly he may think of the natural rectitude and invincible integrity of his own mind, who may not in an evil hour, when he leaſt thinks of it, be betrayed by ſome powerful and unexpected temptation into as much guilt, and become as

blind to his own ſituation, as was that unhappy prince of whom we are now ſpeaking.

It was indiſpenſably neceſſary to rouſe the ſinner out of this dreadful lethargy; but how was this to be done?—Had Nathan plainly and directly charged him with all the enormity of his guilt, the probability is, that either in the firſt tranſport of his reſentment he would have driven the prophet from his preſence, or that he would have attempted to palliate, to ſoften, to explain away his crime; would have pleaded the ſtrength of his paſſion or the violence of the temptation, and perhaps claimed ſome indulgence of his rank and ſituation in life. But all theſe pleas were at once ſilenced, and his retreat completely cut off, by making him the judge of his own caſe, and forcing his condemnation out of his own mouth. For after he had denounced death on the rich man for taking away the ewe lamb of the poor one, he could with no decency pretend that he who had deſtroyed the life of *one* fellow-creature, and the innocence of *another*, was deſerving of a milder ſentence.

There was nothing then left for him but to confeſs at once, as he did, "that he had ſinned againſt the Lord;" and his penitence we know was as ſevere and exemplary as his crime had been atrocious.

It is much to be lamented that theſe indirect methods ſhould be found neceſſary, in order to ſhow men to themſelves, and acquaint them with their real characters, eſpecially when it is their own intereſt not to be miſtaken in ſo important a concern. But the wiſe and the virtuous in every age have condeſcended to make uſe of this innocent artifice; the neceſſity of which is founded in the ſad corruption of human nature, and in that groſs and deplorable blindneſs to their own ſins and follies, which is obſervable in ſo large a part of mankind. They engage with warmth and eagerneſs in worldly purſuits, which employ their attention and excite their paſſions; ſo that they have little time, and leſs inclination, to reflect calmly and ſeriouſly on their own conduct, in a moral and religious point of view. But if their thoughts *are* at any time forced in-

wards, and they cannot help taking a view of themſelves, a deeper ſource of deluſion is ſtill behind. The ſame actions which, when committed by others, are immediately diſcerned to be wrong, are palliated, explained, qualified, and apologized away, when we happen to be guilty of them ourſelves. The circumſtances in the two caſes are diſcovered to be perfectly different in ſome eſſential point; our paſſions were ungovernable, the temptation irreſiſtible. In ſhort, ſomehow or other, all guilt vaniſhes away under the management of the dextrous *caſuiſt*, and the intruſion of ſelf-condemnation is effectually precluded.

Still there remains, it may be ſaid, the admonition of ſome zealous friend or faithful inſtructor; but zeal is generally vehement, and often indiſcreet. By exciting the reſentment, and inflaming the anger of thoſe it means to reform, it frequently defeats its own deſigns. For whoever is offended inſtantly forgets his own faults, and dwells wholly upon thoſe of his imprudent monitor. But when the veil of parable conceals for a moment from the offender that he is himſelf concerned in it, he may generally be ſurprized into a condemnation of every one that is guilty of a baſe diſhonorable action; and when the unexpected application, *Thou art the man*, comes thundering ſuddenly upon him, and points out the perfect ſimilarity of the ſuppoſed caſe to his own, the aſtoniſhed criminal, overwhelmed with confuſion, and driven from all his uſual ſubterfuges and evaſions, is compelled at length to condemn himſelf.

It was probably the conſideration of theſe deluſions, and the other reaſons above aſſigned, which gave riſe to ſo general and ſo ancient a cuſtom of conveying moral inſtruction under the cover of imaginary agents and fictitious events. We find traces of it in the earlieſt writers; and it was more peculiarly cultivated in the eaſt, the region where religion and ſcience firſt took their riſe. The moſt ancient parables perhaps on record are thoſe we meet with in the Old Teſtament; that of Jotham, for inſtance, where the trees deſired the bramble to reign over them*;

* Judges ix. 14.

that of Nathan*; that of the woman of Tekoah†, in the reign of David; and that of the thiſtle and the cedar of Lebanon‡, by Jehoaſh, king of Iſrael. From the eaſt this ſpecies of compoſition paſſed into Greece and Italy, and thence into the reſt of Europe; and there are two celebrated writers, one in the Greek, the other in the Roman tongue, whoſe fables every one is acquainted with from their earlieſt years. Theſe, it muſt be owned, are elegant, amuſing, and, in a certain degree, moral and inſtructive. But they are not in any degree to be compared with the parables of our bleſſed Lord, which infinitely excel *them*, and every other compoſition of that ſpecies, in many eſſential points.

1. In the firſt place, the fables of the ancients are many of them of a very trivial nature, or at the beſt contain nothing more than maxims of mere worldly wiſdom and common prudence, and ſometimes perhaps a little moral inſtruction.

But the parables of our bleſſed Lord relate to ſubjects of the very higheſt importance; to the great leading principles of human conduct, to the eſſential duties of man, to the nature and progreſs of the Chriſtian religion, to the moral government of the world, to the great diſtinctions between vice and virtue, to the awful ſcenes of eternity, to the divine influences of the Holy Spirit, to the great work of our redemption, to a reſurrection and a future judgment, and the diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments in a future ſtate; and all this expreſſed with a dignity of ſentiment, and a ſimplicity of language, perfectly well ſuited to the grandeur of the ſubject.

2. In the next place, the fables of the learned heathens, though entertaining and well compoſed, are in general cold and dry, and calculated more to pleaſe the underſtanding than to touch the heart. Whereas thoſe of our bleſſed Lord are moſt of them in the higheſt degree affecting and intereſting. Such for inſtance are the parable of the loſt ſheep, of the prodigal ſon, of the rich man and

* 2 Sam. xii. 1. † 2 Sam. xiv. ‡ 2 Kings xiv. 9.

Lazarus, of the Phariſee and Publican, of the unforgiving ſervant, of the good Samaritan. There is nothing in all heathen antiquity to be compared to theſe; nothing that ſpeaks ſo forcibly to our tendereſt feelings and affections, and leave ſuch deep and laſting impreſſions upon the ſoul.

3dly. The Greek and Roman fables are moſt of them founded on improbable or impoſſible circumſtances, and are ſuppoſed converſations between animate or inanimate beings, not endowed with the power of ſpeech; between birds, beaſts, reptiles, and trees; a circumſtance which ſhocks the imagination, and of courſe weakens the force of the inſtruction.

Our Saviour's parables on the contrary are all of them images and alluſions taken from nature, and from occurrences which are moſt familiar to our obſervation and experience in common life; and the events related are not only ſuch as might very probably happen, but ſeveral of them are ſuppoſed to be ſuch as actually did; and this would have the effect of a true hiſtorical narrative, which we all know to carry much greater weight and authority with it than the moſt ingenious fiction. Of the former ſort are the rich man and Lazarus, of the good Samaritan, and of the prodigal ſon. There are others in which our Saviour ſeems to allude to ſome hiſtorical facts which happened in thoſe times; as that wherein it is ſaid, that a king went into a far country, there to receive a kingdom.

This probably refers to the hiſtory of Archelaus, who, after the death of his father, Herod the Great, went to Rome to receive from Auguſtus the confirmation of his father's will, by which he had the kingdom of Judea left to him.

Theſe circumſtances give a decided ſuperiority to our Lord's parables over the fables of the ancients; and if we compare them with thoſe of the Koran, the difference is ſtill greater. The parables of Mahomet are trifling; unintereſting, tedious, and dull. Among other things which he has borrowed from Scripture, one is the para-

ble of Nathan, in which he has moſt ingenuouſly contrived to deſtroy all its ſpirit, force, and beauty; and has ſo completely diſtorted and deformed its whole texture and compoſition, that if the commentator had not informed you, in very gentle terms, that it is the parable of Nathan *a little diſguiſed*, you would ſcarce have known it to be the ſame. Such is the difference between a prophet who is really inſpired, and an impoſtor who pretends to be ſo.

Nor is it only in his parables, but in his other diſcourſes to the people, that Jeſus draws his doctrines and inſtructions from the ſcenes of nature, from the objects that ſurrounded him, from the moſt common occurrences of life, from the ſeaſons of the year, from ſome extraordinary incidents or remarkable tranſactions. "Thus," as a learned and ingenious writer has obſerved*, upon curing a blind man, "he ſtyles himſelf the light of the world, and reproves the Phariſees for their ſpiritual blindneſs and inexcuſable obſtinacy in refuſing to be cured and enlightened by him. On little children being brought to him, he recommends the innocence, the ſimplicity, the meekneſs, the humility, the docility, of that lovely age, as indiſpenſable qualifications for thoſe that would enter into the kingdom of heaven. Beholding the flowers of the field, and the fowls of the air, he teaches his diſciples to frame right and worthy notions of that Providence which ſupports and adorns them, and will therefore aſſuredly not neglect the ſuperior order of rational beings. Obſerving the fruits of the earth, he inſtructs them to judge of men by their fruitfulneſs under all the mean of grace. From the mention of meat and drink, he leads them to the ſacred rite of eating his body and drinking his blood in a ſpiritual ſenſe. From external ablutions, he deduces the neceſſity of purifying the heart, and cleanſing the affections. Thoſe that were fiſhers, he teaches to be fiſhers of men; to draw them by the force of argument and perſuaſion, aided by the influence of divine grace, to the belief and practice of true religion. Seeing the money-changers, he exhorts his diſciples to lay out their ſeveral talents to the beſt advantage. Being among the ſheep-folds, he proves himſelf

* See Biſhop Law's Conſiderations on the Theory of Religion.

the true ſhepherd of Souls. Among vines he diſcourſes of the ſpiritual huſbandman and vine-dreſſer, and draws a parallel between *his* vineyard and the natural one. Upon the appearance of ſummer in the trees before him, he points out evident ſigns of his approaching kingdom.—When the harveſt comes on, he reminds his diſciples of the ſpiritual harveſt, the harveſt of true believers; and exhorts them to labor diligently in that work, and add their prayers to Heaven for its ſucceſs. From ſervants being made free in the ſabbatical year, he takes occaſion to proclaim a nobler emancipation and more important redemption from the ſlavery of ſin, and the bondage of corruption, by the death of Chriſt. From the eminence of a city ſtanding on a hill, he turns his diſcourſe to the conſpicuous ſituation of his own diſciples. From the temple before him, he points to that of his own body; and from Herod's unadviſedly leading out his army to meet the king of Arabia, who came againſt him with a ſuperior force, and defeated him, a leſſon is held out to all who entered on the Chriſtian warfare, that they ſhould firſt well weigh and carefully compute the difficulties attending it, and by the grace of God reſolve to ſurmount them."

In the ſame manner, when he delivered the parable of the ſower, which we find in this chapter, and which will be the next ſubject of our conſideration, it was probably ſeed-time, and from the ſhip in which he taught he might obſerve the huſbandmen ſcattering their ſeed upon the earth. From thence he took occaſion to illuſtrate, by that rural and familiar image, the different effects which the doctrines of Chriſtianity had on different men, according to the different tempers and diſpoſitions that they happened to meet with.

"Behold," ſays he, "a ſower went forth to ſow. And when he ſowed, ſome fell by the way-ſide, and the fowls came and devoured them up. Some fell upon ſtony places, where they had not much earth, and fortwith they ſprung up, becauſe they had no deepneſs of earth; and when the ſun was up they were ſcorched, and becauſe they had no root they withered away. And ſome fell among thorns, and the thorns ſprang up and choked them. But other

fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, ſome a hundred fold, ſome ſixty fold, ſome thirty fold." As our bleſſed Lord, ſoon after he had uttered this parable, explained it to his diſciples, it is highly proper that you ſhould have this explanation in his own words. "Hear ye, therefore," ſays he, "the parable of the ſower.—When any one heareth the word of the kingdom and underſtandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was ſown in his heart. This is he which received ſeed by the way-ſide. But he received the ſeed into ſtony places, the ſame is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himſelf, but dureth for a while; for when tribulation or perſecution ariſeth becauſe of the word, by and by he is offended. He alſo that received ſeed among the thorns, is he that heareth the word, and and the cares of this world and the deceitfulneſs of riches choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that received ſeed into the good ground, is he that heareth the word and underſtandeth it; which alſo beareth fruit, and bringeth forth ſome a hundred fold, ſome ſixty, ſome thirty."

Such is the parable of the ſower, and the explanation of it by our Saviour, which will furniſh us with abundant matter for a great variety of very important reflections. But as theſe cannot be diſtinctly ſtated and ſufficiently enlarged upon at preſent, without going to a conſiderable length of time, and treſpaſſing too far on that patience and indulgence which I have already but too often put to the teſt, I muſt reſerve for my next Lecture the obſervations I have to offer on this very intereſting and inſtructive parable.

LECTURE XII.

MATTHEW xiii. continued.

THE laſt Lecture concluded with a recital of the parable of the ſower, and our Lord's explanation of it; and I now proceed to lay before you thoſe reflections which it has ſuggeſted to my mind.

In the firſt place then it muſt be obſerved, that this parable, like many others, is prophetic as well as inſtructive; it predicts the fate of the Chriſtian religion in the world, and the different ſorts of reception it will meet with from different men. And as this prediction is completely verified by the preſent ſtate of religion, as we ſee it at this hour exiſting among ourſelves, it affords one very deciſive proof of Chriſt's power of foreſeeing future events, and of courſe tends ſtrongly to eſtabliſh the truth of his pretenſions, and the divine authority of his religion.

In the next place it is evident that there are four different claſſes of men here deſcribed, which comprehend all the different religious or irreligious characters that are to be met with in the world. The firſt conſiſts of thoſe "that hear the word of the kingdom (as our Lord expreſſes it) and underſtand it not; then cometh the wicked one and catcheth away that which was ſown in their hearts. Theſe are they, ſays he, which received ſeed by the wayſide." By theſe are meant thoſe perſons whoſe minds, like the beaten high road, are hard and impenetrable, and inacceſſible to conviction. Of theſe we all know there are too many in the world; ſome who have imbibed early and deep-rooted prejudices againſt Chriſtianity; who either conceiving themſelves ſuperior to the reſt of mankind in genius, knowledge, and penetration, reject with ſcorn whatever the bulk of mankind receives with veneration,

and erect favourite ſyſtems of their own, which they conceive to be the very perfection of human wiſdom; or, on the other hand, having been unfortunately very early initiated in the writings of modern philoſophiſts, implicitly adopt the opinions of thoſe whom they conſider as the great luminaries and oracles of the age, receive ridicule as argument, and aſſertion as proof and prefer the ſilly witticiſms, the ſpecious ſophiſtry, the metaphyſical ſubtlety, the courſe buffoonery, which diſtinguiſh many of the moſt popular opponents of our faith, to the ſimplicity, dignity, and ſublimity of the divine truths of the Goſpel. Theſe are the profeſſed infidels, or, as they chooſe to ſtyle themſelves, the diſciples of philoſophy and reaſon, and the enemies of prieſtcraft, fanaticiſm, and ſuperſtition.

But beſides theſe there is another deſcription of men, on whom the good ſeek makes little or no impreſſion; *theſe* are the thoughtleſs, the inattentive, the inconſiderate, the trifling, the gay, who think of nothing beyond the preſent ſcene, and who do not conſider themſelves as in the ſmalleſt degree intereſted in any thing elſe. Theſe men, without profeſſing themſelves unbelievers, without formally and explicitly rejecting the Goſpel, yet do in fact never concern themſelves about it. It forms no part of their ſyſtem, it does not at all enter into their plans of life. The former ſort above deſcribed are infidels on principle; theſe are practical infidels, without any principle at all. Being born of Chriſtian parents, and inſtructed perhaps in the firſt rudiments of Chriſtianity, they call themſelves Chriſtian; they attend divine ſervice, they repeat their prayers, they liſten to the diſcourſes of the preacher, they make no objections to what they hear, they queſtion not the propriety of what they are taught? but here their religion ends; it never goes beyond the ſurface, it never penetrates into their hearts, *it lies on the hard beaten highway.* The inſtant they leave the church, every idea of religion vaniſhes out of their thoughts; they never reflect for one moment on what they have heard; they never conſider the infinite importance of what is to happen after death? the awful proſpects of eternity never preſent themſelves to their minds, neither excite their hopes nor alarm their fears.—

"With their mouths indeed they confeſs the Lord Jeſus, but they do not believe with their hearts unto ſalvation;" and although perhaps in the wide waſte of a trifling inſignificant life, a few worthy actions or a few ſolitary virtues appear, yet their affections are not ſet on things above, their hopes are not centered there, their views do not tend there; their treaſure is on earth, and there is their heart alſo.

Theſe two characters, the hardened unbeliever, and the mere nominal Chriſtian, conſtitute the firſt claſs deſcribed by our Saviour in the parable of the ſower. "Theſe are they which receive the ſeed by the way ſide, where it lies neglected upon the ſurface, till "the fowls of the air devour it, or the wicked one catcheth it out of their hearts;" and there is an end at once of all their hopes of ſalvation, perhaps for ever.

Secondly, There is another ſort of ſoil mentioned in the parable, which gives the ſeed at firſt a more favourable reception. When it falls on ſtony ground, it finds no great difficulty in gaining admiſſion into a little looſe earth ſcattered upon a rock; it ſprings up with amazing rapidity; but no ſooner "does the ſun riſe upon it with its ſcorching heat, than it withers away for want of depth of earth, root, and moiſture."

What a lively repreſentation is this of weak and unſtable Chriſtians! They receive Chriſtianity at firſt with gladneſs; they are extremely ready to be made eternally happy, and ſuppoſe that they have nothing elſe to do but to repeat their creed, and take poſſeſſion of heaven. But when they find that there are certain conditions to be performed on *their* parts alſo; that they muſt give up their favourite intereſts and reſtrain their ſtrongeſt paſſions, muſt ſometimes even pluck out a right eye or tear off a right arm; that they muſt take up their croſs and follow a crucified Saviour through many difficulties, diſtreſſes, and perſecutions, their ardour and alacrity are inſtantly extinguiſhed. They want ſtrength of mind, ſoundneſs of principle, and ſincerity of faith to ſupport them. No wonder then that they fall away and depart from their allegiance

to their divine Maſter and Redeemer. This is the ſecond ſort of hearers deſcribed in the parable, "that receive the word at firſt with joy; but having no root in themſelves, when tribulation and perſecution ariſe becauſe of the word, by and by they are offended." This refers more immediately to the firſt diſciples and firſt preachers of the Goſpel, who were expoſed in the diſcharge of their high office to the ſevereſt trials, and the crueleſt perſecutions from their numerous and powerful enemies. Some of them undoubtedly, who had not ſufficient root in themſelves, gave way to the ſtorms that aſſailed them, and made ſhipwreck of their faith, as our Lord here foretels that they would. But others we know ſtood firm and unmoved, amidſt the moſt tremenduous dangers, and underwent, with unparalleled fortitude, the moſt excruciating torments. The deſcription which the writer to the Hebrews gives of the ſaints and prophets of old, may, with the ſtricteſt truth, be applied to the apoſtles and their ſucceſſors in the firſt ages of the Goſpel, under the various perſecutions to which they were expoſed. "They had trial of cruel mockings and ſcourgings, yea moreover of bonds and impriſonments. They were ſtoned, they were ſawn aſunder, were tempted, were ſlain with the ſword, were deſtitute, afflicted, tormented*." All theſe barbarities they endured with unſhaken patience and firmneſs, and thereby bore the ſtrongeſt poſſible teſtimony, not only to their own ſincerity, but to the divine and miraculous influence of the religion which they taught. For it is juſtly and forcibly obſerved by the excellent Mr. Addiſon, that the aſtoniſhing and unexampled fortitude which was ſhewn by innumerable multitudes of martyrs, in thoſe ſlow and painful torments that were inflicted on them, is nothing leſs than *a ſtanding miracle* during the three firſt centuries. "I cannot, ſays he, conceive a man placed in the burning iron chair of Lyons, amidſt the inſults and mockeries of a crowded amphitheatre, and ſtill keeping his ſeat; or ſtretched upon a grate of iron over an intenſe fire, and breathing out his ſoul amidſt the exquiſite ſufferings of ſuch a tedious execution, rather than renounce his religion, or blaſpheme his Saviour, without ſuppoſing ſomething

* Hebrew xi. 37.

ſupernatural. Such trials ſeem to me above the ſtrength of human nature, and able to overbear duty, reaſon, faith, conviction, nay, and the moſt abſolute certainty of a future ſtate. We can eaſily imagine that a few perſons in ſo good a cauſe might have laid down their lives at the gibbet, the ſtake, or the block; but that *multitudes* of each ſex, of every age, of different countries and conditions, ſhould, for near three hundred years together, expire leiſurely amidſt the moſt exquiſite tortures, rather than apoſtatize from the truth, has ſomething in it ſo far beyond the natural ſtrength and force of mortals, that one cannot but conclude there was ſome miraculous power to ſupport the ſufferers; and if ſo, here is at once a proof, from hiſtory and from fact, of the divine origin of our religion*."

There is a third portion of the ſeed that falls among thorns. This wants neither root nor depth of earth. It grows up; but the misfortune is, that the thorns grow up with it. The fault of the ſoil is not that of bearing nothing, but of bearing too much; of bearing what it ought not, of exhauſting its ſtrength and nutrition on vile and worthleſs productions, which choke the good ſeed, and prevent it from coming to perfection. "Theſe are they, ſays our Saviour, in the parallel place of St. Luke, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares, and riches, and pleaſures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection." In their youth perhaps they receive religious inſtruction, they imbibe right principles, and liſten to good advice; but no ſooner do they *go forth*, no ſooner do they leave thoſe perſons and thoſe places from whom they received them, than they take the road either of buſineſs or of pleaſure, purſue their intereſts, their amuſements, or their guilty indulgences with unbounded eagerneſs, and have neither time nor inclination to cultivate the ſeeds of religion that have been ſown in their hearts, and to eradicate the weeds that have been mingled with them. The conſequence is, that the weeds prevail, and the ſeeds are choked and loſt.

* Addiſon's Evidences, §. 7.

Can there poſſibly be a more faithful picture of a large proportion of the Chriſtian world? Let us look around us, and obſerve how the greater part of thoſe we meet with are employed. In what is it that their thoughts are buſied, their views, their hopes, and their fears centered, their attention occupied, their hearts and ſouls and affections engaged? Is it in ſearching the Scriptures, in meditating on its doctrines, its precepts, its exhortations, its promiſes, and its threats? Is it in communing with their own hearts, in probing them to the very bottom, in looking carefully whether there be any way of wickedneſs in them, in plucking out every noxious weed, and leaving room for the good ſeed to grow and ſwell and expand itſelf, and bring forth fruit to perfection? Is it in cultivating purity of manners, a ſpirit of charity towards the whole human race, and the moſt exalted ſentiments of piety, gratitude, and love towards their Maker and Redeemer? Theſe I fear are far from being the general and principal occupations of mankind. Too many of them are, God knows, very differently employed. They are overwhelmed with buſineſs, they are devoted to amuſement, they are immerſed in ſenſuality, they are mad with ambition, they are idolaters of wealth, of power, of glory, of fame. On theſe things all their affections are fixed. Theſe are the great objects of their purſuit; and if any accidental thought of religion happens to croſs their way, they inſtantly diſmiſs the unbidden, unwelcome gueſt, with the anſwer of Felix to Paul, "Go thy way for this time; when we have a convenient ſeaſon we will ſend for thee."

But how then, it is ſaid, are we to conduct ourſelves? If Providence has bleſſed us with riches, with honor, with power, with reputation, are we to reject theſe gifts of our heavenly Father; or ought we not rather to accept them with thankfulneſs, and enjoy with gratitude, the advantages and the comforts which his bounty has beſtowed upon us? Moſt aſſuredly we ought. But then they are to be enjoyed alſo with innocence, with temperance, and with moderation. They muſt not be allowed to uſurp the firſt place in our hearts. They muſt not be permitted to ſup-

plant God in our affection, or to dispute that pre-eminence and priority which he claims over every propensity of our nature. This and this only can prevent the good seed from being choked with the cares, the rices, and the pleasures of the present life.

We now come in the last place to the seed which fell on good ground, which our Lord tells us in St. Luke, denotes those that in an honest and good heart, having heard word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience, some an hundred fold, some sixty, some thirty.

We here see that the first and principal qualification for hearing the word of God, for keeping it, for rendering it capable of bringing forth fruit, is *an honest and a good heart*; that is, a heart free from all those evil dispositions and corrupt passions which blind the eyes, distort the understanding, and obstruct the admission of divine truth; a heart perfectly clear from prejudice, from pride, from vanity, from self-sufficiency, and self-conceit; a heart sincerely disposed and earnestly desirous to find out the truth, and firmly resolved to embrace it when found;—ready to acknowledge its own ignorance, and weakness, and corruption, and "to receive with meekness the ingrafted word, which is able to save the soul."

This is that innocence and simplicity and singleness of mind, which we find so frequently recommended and so highly applauded by our blessed Lord, and which is so beautifully and feelingly described when young children were brought to him that he should touch them, and were checked by his disciples. "Suffer little children to come unto me, says he, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven; and then he adds, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child he shall not enter therein*." Here, in a few words, and by a most significant and affecting emblem, is expressed that temper and disposition of mind which is the most essential qualification for the kingdom of heaven. Unless we come to the Gospel with that meekness, gentleness, docility, and

* Mark x. 14, 15.

guileleſs ſimplicity, which conſtitute the character of a child, and render him ſo lovely and captivating, we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven; we cannot either aſſent to the evidence, believe the doctrines, or obey the precepts of the Chriſtian religion. Hence we ſee the true reaſon why ſo many men of diſtinguiſhed talents have rejected the religion of Chriſt. It is not becauſe its evidences are defective, or its doctrines repugnant to reaſon; it is becauſe their diſpoſitions were the very reverſe of what the Goſpel requires; becauſe (as their writings evidently ſhow) they were high-ſpirited, violent, proud, conceited, vain, diſdainful, and ſometimes profligate too; becauſe, in ſhort, they wanted that honeſt and good heart, which not only receives the good ſeed, but keeps it, and nouriſhes it with unceaſing patience, till it bring forth fruit to perfection. They could not enter into the marriage feaſt becauſe they had not on the wedding garment, becauſe they were *not clothed with humility**. For "God reſiſteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. Them that are meek ſhall he guide in judgment, and ſuch as are gentle, them ſhall he learn his way†."

But here ariſes a difficulty on which the enemies of our faith lay great ſtreſs, and frequently alledge as an excuſe for their infidelity and impiety. If, ſay they, the ſucceſs of the good ſeed depends on the ſoil in which it is ſown, the ſucceſs of the Goſpel muſt, in the ſame manner, depend (as this very parable is meant to prove) on the temper and diſpoſition of the recipient, of the perſon to whom it is offered. Now this temper and diſpoſition are not of our own making: they are the work of nature; they are what our Creator has given us. If then, in any particular inſtance, they are unfortunately ſuch as diſqualify us for the reception of the Goſpel, the fault is not ours; it is in the ſoil, it is in our natural conſtitution, for which ſurely we cannot be held reſponſible.

This plea is ſpecious and plauſible; but it is nothing more. The fact is, that the imbecility and corruption introduced into our moral frame by the fall of our firſt pa-

* 1 Pet. v. 5. † James, iv. 6. Pſalm, xxv. 9.

sents, is in some measure felt by all; but undoubtedly in different individuals shews itself in different degrees, and *that* from their very earliest years. Look at any large family of children living together under the eye of their parents, and you will frequently discover in them a surprising variety of tempers, humors, and dispositions; and although the same instructions are given to all, the same care and attention, the same discipline, the same vigilance exercised over each, yet some shall be, in their general conduct, meek, gentle, and submissive; others impetuous, passionate, and froward; some active, enterprizing, and bold; others quiet, contented and calm; some cunning, artful, and close; others open, frank, and ingenuous; some, in short, malevolent, mischievous, and unfeeling; others kind, compassionate, good-natured, and though sometimes betraying the infirmity of human nature by casual omissions of duty and errors of conduct, yet soon made sensible of their faults, and easily led back to regularity, order, piety, and virtue.

Here then is unquestionably the difference of natural constitution contended for. But what is the true inference? Is it that those whose dispositions are the worst are to give themselves up for lost, are to abandon all hopes of salvation, and to alledge their depraved nature as a sufficient apology for infidelity or vice, as constituting a complete inability either to believe or to obey the Gospel? No such thing. On the contrary, it is a strong and powerful call, first upon their parents and the guides of their youth, and afterwards upon themselves, to watch over, to restrain, to correct, to amend, to meliorate their evil dispositions, and to supply, by attention, by discipline and by prayer, what has been denied by nature. It may be thought hard, perhaps, that all this care, and labor, and painful conflict, should be necessary to some, and not (in the same degree at least) to others; and that so marked a distinction in so important a point should be made between creatures of the same species. But is not the same distinction made in other points of importance? Are not men placed from their very birth by the hand of Providence in different situations of rank, power, wealth? Are

not ſome indulged with every advantage, every bleſſing that their hearts can wiſh, and others ſunk in obſcurity, penury, and wretchedneſs? Are not ſome favored with the moſt ſplendid talents and capacities for acquiring knowledge; others ſlow in conception, weak in underſtanding, and almoſt impenetrable to inſtruction? Are not ſome bleſſed from their birth with ſtrong, healthy, robuſt conſtitutions, ſubject to no infirmities, no diſeaſes; others weak, ſickly, tender, liable to perpetual diſorders, and with the utmoſt difficulty dragging on a precarious exiſtence? Yet does this preclude all theſe different individuals from improving their condition; does it prevent the loweſt member of ſociety from endeavoring to raiſe himſelf into a ſuperior claſs; does it prevent the moſt indigent from laboring to acquire a fortune by induſtry, frugality, and activity; does it prevent the moſt ignorant from cultivating their minds, and furniſhing them with ſome degree of knowledge; does it prevent thoſe of the tendereſt and moſt delicate frames from ſtrengthening, confirming, and invigorating their health, by management, by medicine, and by temperance? We ſee the contrary every day; we ſee all theſe different characters ſucceeding in their efforts beyond their moſt ſanguine expectations, and riſing to a degree of opulence, of rank, of power, of learning, and of health, of which at their outſet they could not have formed the moſt diſtant idea. And why then are we not to act in the ſame manner with regard to our natural tempers, diſpoſitions, propenſities, and inclinations? Why are we not to ſuppoſe *them* as capable of improvement and melioration as our condition, our fortune, our intellectual powers, and our bodily health? Why are we to alledge impoſſibility in one caſe more than in the others? The truth is, that a bad conſtitution of mind as well as of body may, by proper care and attention, and the powerful influences of the Holy Spirit, be greatly, if not wholly, amended. And as it ſometimes happens that they who have the weakeſt and moſt diſtempered frames by means of an exact regimen and an unſhaken perſeverance in rule and method, outlive thoſe of a robuſter make and more luxuriant health; ſo there are abundant inſtances where men of the moſt perverſe diſpoſitions and moſt depraved

turn of mind, by keeping a ſteady guard upon their weak parts, and gradually, but continually, correcting their defects, applying earneſtly for aſſiſtance from above, going on from ſtrength to ſtrength, and from one degree of perfection to another, have at length arrived at a higher pitch of virtue than thoſe for whom nature had done much more, and who would therefore do but little for themſelves.

Let us then never deſpair. If we have not from conſtitution that honeſt and good heart which is neceſſary for receiving the good ſeed, and bringeth forth fruit with patience, we may by degrees, and by the bleſſing of God, gradually acquire it. If the ſoil is not originally good, it may be made ſo by labor and cultivation; but above all, by imploring our heavenly Father to ſhower down upon it the plentiful effuſions of his grace, which he has promiſed to all that devoutly and fervently and conſtantly pray for it. This dew from heaven, "ſhed abroad on our hearts*," will refreſh and invigorate and purify our ſouls; will correct the very worſt diſpoſition; will ſoften and ſubdue the hardeſt and moſt ungrateful ſoil, will make clean and pure and moiſt, fit for the reception of the good ſeed; and notwithſtanding its original poverty and barrenneſs, will enrich it with ſtrength and vigor ſufficient to bring forth fruit to perfection.

I have now finiſhed theſe Lectures for the preſent year, and muſt, on this occaſion, again entreat you to let thoſe truths, to which you have liſtened with ſo much patience and perſeverance, take entire poſſeſſion of your hearts. They are not vain, they are not trivial things, they are the words of eternal life; they relate to the moſt important of all human concerns, to the moſt eſſential intereſts and comforts of the preſent life, and to the deſtiny, the eternal deſtiny of happineſs or miſery that awaits you in the next.

You have juſt heard the parable of the ſower explained, and it behoves you to conſider in which of the four claſſes of men there deſcribed you can fairly rank yourſelves.

* Rom. v. 5.

Are you in the number of thoſe that receive the ſeed by the way-ſide, on hearts as impenetrable and inacceſſible to conviction as the hard beaten high road? or of thoſe that receive the ſeed on a little looſe earth ſcattered on a rock, where it quickly ſprings up, and as quickly withers away? or of thoſe in whom the ſeed is choked with thorns, with the occupations and pleaſures of this life? or, laſtly, of thoſe who receive the ſeed on good ground, on an honeſt and good heart, and bring forth fruit, ſome a hundred fold, ſome ſixty, ſome thirty? It becomes every one of you to aſk yourſelves this queſtion very ſeriouſly, and to anſwer it very honeſtly; for on that depends the whole color of your future condition here and hereafter.

There are none I truſt here preſent, there are few I believe in this country, who fall under the firſt deſcription of profeſſed and hardened unbelievers; and amidſt many painful circumſtances of theſe awful and anxious times it is ſome conſolation to us to reflect, that the incredible pains which have been taken in a multitude of vile publications to induce the people of this country to apoſtatize from their religion, have not made that general and permanent impreſſion on their minds which might naturally have been expected from ſuch malignant and reiterated efforts to ſhake their principles and ſubvert their faith. But there are other inſtruments of perverſion and corruption, much more formidable and more powerful than theſe. There are rank and noxious weeds and thorns, which grow up with the good ſeed and choke it, and prevent it from coming to maturity. Theſe are, as the parable tells us, the cares, the riches, and the pleaſures of this world, which in our paſſage through life lay hold upon our hearts, and are more dangerous obſtructions to the Goſpel than all the ſpeculative arguments and ſpecious ſophiſtry of all its adverſaries put together. It is but ſeldom, I believe, comparatively ſpeaking, that men are fairly reaſoned out of their religion. But they are very frequently ſeduced, both from the practice and the belief of it, by treacherous paſſions within, and violent temptations from without, by "the luſt of the fleſh, the luſt of the eye, and the pride of life." Theſe are in fact the moſt common, the moſt

powerful enemies of our faith. These are the weeds and the thorns that twist themselves round every fibre of our hearts, which impede the growth and destroy the fruitfulness of every good principle that has been implanted there, and form that third and most numerous class of hearers described in the parable of the sower, who, though not professed infidels, are yet practical unbelievers, and who though they retain the form, have lost all the substance, all the power, all the life and soul of religion.

It is then against these most dangerous corruptors of our fidelity and allegiance to our heavenly Master, that we must principally be upon our guard; it is against these we must arm and prepare our souls, by summoning all our fortitude and resolution, and calling in to our aid all those spiritual succors which the power of prayer can draw down upon us from above. It was to assist us in this arduous conflict that the compilers of our liturgy appointed the season of Lent, and more particularly the offices of the concluding week, which, from the sufferings of our Saviour at that time, we call *Passion week*. It was thought, and surely it was wisely thought, by our ancestors, that to fortify ourselves against the attractions of the world, and the seductions of sin, it was necessary to withdraw ourselves sometimes from the tumultuous and intoxicating scenes of business and of pleasure, which, in the daily commerce of life, press so close on every side of us; and to strengthen and confirm our minds against their fatal influence, by retirement, by recollection, by self-communion, by self-examination, by meditating on the word of God, and, above all, by frequent and fervent prayer. To give us time for these sacred occupations, a small portion of every year has been judiciously set apart for them by our church; and what time could be so proper for those holy purposes, as that in which our blessed Lord was suffering so much for our sakes? I allude more particularly to that solemn week which is now approaching, and to which I must beg to call the most serious attention of every one here present.

In that week all public diversions are, as you well know, wisely prohibited by public authority; and in conformity

to the ſpirit of ſuch prohibition, we ſhould, even in our own families and in our own private amuſements, be temperate, modeſt, decorous, and diſcreet. Think not, however, that I am here recommending gloom and melancholy, and a ſecluſion from all ſociety; far from it. This could anſwer no other purpoſe but to ſour your minds and to deaden your devotions. The cheerfulneſs of ſocial converſe and friendly intercourſe is by no means inconſiſtent with the duties of the week; but all thoſe tumultuous aſſemblies, which are too ſtrongly marked with an air of levity, gaiety, and diſſipation, and may in fact be ranked with the number of *public* diverſions, are plainly repugnant to that ſerioufneſs and tenderneſs of mind, which the awful and intereſting events of that week muſt naturally inſpire. Let me only requeſt you to read over, when you return home, that plain, ſimple, unaffected, yet touching narrative of our Saviour's ſufferings, which is ſelected from the Goſpels, in the daily offices of the next week; and then aſk your own hearts whether, at the very time when your Redeemer is ſuppoſed to have paſſed through all thoſe dreadful ſcenes for your ſakes and for your ſalvation, from his firſt agony in the garden, to his laſt expiring groan upon the croſs, whether at this very time you can bring yourſelves to purſue the pleaſures, the vanities, and the follies of the world, with the ſame unqualified eagerneſs and unabated ardour as if nothing had happened which had given him the ſlighteſt pain, or in which you had the ſmalleſt intereſt or concern. Your hearts, I am ſure, will revolt at the very idea, and your own feelings will preſerve you from thus wontonly ſporting with the croſs of Chriſt. And if from a prudent abſtinence from theſe things your were to add a careful enquiry into your paſt conduct, and the preſent ſtate of your ſouls, if you were to extend your views to another world, and conſider what your condition there is likely to be; what reaſonable grounds you have to hope for a favorable ſentence from your Almighty Judge; how far you have conformed to the commands of your Maker, and what degree of affection and gratitude you have manifeſted for the inexpreſſible kindneſs of your Redeemer; this ſurely would be an employment not inconſiſtent with your neceſſary occupa-

tions, and not unſuitable to humble candidates for pardon, acceptance, and immortal happineſs.

Is this too great a burden to be impoſed upon us for a few days; is it too great a ſacrifice of our time, our thoughts and our amuſements to an inviſible world and a reverſionary inheritance of ineſtimable value? It certainly is if the goſpel be all a fabricated tale. But if it contain the words of ſoberneſs and truth; if its divine authority is eſtabliſhed by ſuch an accumulation of evidence of various kinds as never before concurred to prove any other facts or events in the hiſtory of the world, by evidences ſpringing from different ſources, yet all centering in the ſame point, and converging to the ſame concluſion; if even the few incidental proofs that have been offered to your conſideration in the courſe of theſe Lectures have produced that conviction in your minds which they ſeem to have done, what then is the conſequence? Is it not that truths of ſuch infinite importance well deſerve all that conſideration for which I am now contending; and that we ought to embrace with eagerneſs every appointed means and every favorable opportunity that is thrown in our way, of demonſtrating our attachment and our gratitude to a crucified Saviour, who died for our ſins and roſe again for our juſtification, and will come once more in glory to judge the world in righteouſneſs, and to diſtribute his rewards and puniſhments to all the nations of the earth aſſembled before him? At that awful tribunal may we all appear with a humble confidence in the merits of our Redeemer, and a trembling hope of that mercy which he has promiſed to every ſincere believer, every truly contrite and penitent offender!

LECTURE XIII.

MATTHEW xiii. continued.

THE Lectures of the laſt year concluded with an explanation of the parable of the ſower; and immediately after this follows in the Goſpel the parable of the tares, which will be the ſubject of our preſent conſideration*.

The parable is as follows: "The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which ſowed good ſeed in his field; but while men ſlept, his enemy came and ſowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was ſprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares alſo. So the ſervants of the houſeholder came and ſaid unto him, Sir, didſt thou not ſow good ſeed in thy field; from whence then hath it tares? He ſaid unto them, an enemy hath done this. The ſervants ſaid unto him, wilt thou then that we go and gather them up. But he ſaid nay, leſt while ye gather up the tares, ye root up alſo the wheat with them. Let both grow together unto the harveſt; and in the time of harveſt I will ſay to the reapers, gather ye together firſt the tares, and bind them up in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn."

After our Lord had delivered this parable, and one or two more very ſhort ones, we are told that he ſent the multitude away, and went into the houſe; and his diſciples came unto him ſaying, "Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He anſwered and ſaid unto them, he that ſoweth the good ſeed is the Son of man. The field is the world; the good ſeed are the children of the kingdom, but the tares are the children of the wicked

* Matth. xiii. 24.

one. The enemy that ſowed them is the devil. The harveſt is the end of the world, and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, ſo ſhall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man ſhall ſend forth his angels, and they ſhall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, and ſhall caſt them into a furnace of fire, there ſhall be weeping and gnaſhing of teeth. Then ſhall the righteous ſhine forth as the ſun in the kingdom of their Father: who hath ears to hear let him hear."

This parable well deſerves our moſt ſerious conſideration, as it gives an anſwer to two queſtions of great curioſity and great importance, which have exerciſed the ingenuity and agitated the minds of thinking men from the earlieſt times to the preſent, and perhaps were never, at any period of the world, more intereſting than at this very hour.

The firſt of theſe queſtions is, how came moral evil into the world?

The next is, why it is ſuffered to remain a ſingle moment; and why is not every wicked man immediately puniſhed as he deſerves?

The firſt of theſe queſtions has, we know, in almoſt all ages, and in all countries, been a conſtant ſubject of inveſtigation and controverſy among metaphyſicians and theologians, and has given birth to an infinity of fanciful theories and ſyſtems, to one more particularly in our own times, by a man of very diſtinguiſhed talents*; all which however have failed of ſolving the difficulty, and have proved nothing more than this mortifying and humiliating truth, namely, the extreme weakneſs of the human intellect, when applied to ſubjects ſo far above its reach, and the utter inability of man to fathom the counſels of the Moſt High, and to develop the myſterious ways of his providence, by the ſole ſtrength of unaſſiſted rea-

* Soame Jenyns.

ſon*. That thoſe who were never favored with the light of revelation ſhould indulge themſelves in ſuch abſtruſe ſpeculations, can be no great wonder, but that they who have acceſs to the original fountain of truth, and can draw from that ſacred ſource the moſt authentic information on this point, ſhould have recourſe to the fallible conjectures of human ingenuity, and ſhould hew out to themſelves "ciſterns, broken ciſterns, that can hold no water," is a moſt unaccountable error of judgment, and a ſtrange miſapplication of talents, and waſte of labor and of time. We are told in the very beginning of the Bible, that he who firſt brought ſin or moral evil into the world, was that great adverſary of the human race, the devil, who firſt tempted the woman, and ſhe the man, to act in direct contradiction to the commands of their Maker.

This act of diſobedience deſtroyed at once that innocence and purity and integrity of mind, with which they came out of the hands of their Creator; gave an immediate and dreadful ſhock to their whole moral frame, and introduced into it all thoſe corrupt propenſities and diſordered paſſions which they bequeathed as a fatal legacy to their deſcendants; of which we all now feel the bitter fruits, and have, I fear, by our own perſonal and voluntary tranſgreſſions, not a little improved the wretched inheritance we received from our anceſtors. This is the true origin of moral evil; and it is expreſsly confirmed by our Saviour in the parable before us; in which, when the ſervants of the houſeholder expreſs their ſurpriſe at finding tares among the wheat, and aſk whence they came, his anſwer is, *an enemy hath done this;* and that enemy our Lord informs us is the devil; that inveterate implacable enemy (as the very name of Satan imports) of the human race, the original author of all our calamities, and

* Among the diſſertations of Plutarch (which go by the name of his morals,) there is a very curious and ingenious one, intitled *peri tōn upo tou theiou bradeōs timōroumenōn*, concerning thoſe whom the Deity is ſlow in puniſhing. In this, among other juſt remarks, he obſerves, "that many things which great generals, and legiſlators, and ſtateſmen do, are to common obſervers incomprehenſible. What wonder is it then, ſays he, if we cannot underſtand why the gods inflict puniſhment on the wicked, ſometimes at an earlier, ſometimes at a later period? Plut. Ed. Xyland. v. 2. p. 549. F.

at this moment the prime mover and great maſter-ſpring of all the wickedneſs and all the miſery that now overwhelm the world.

To this account great objections have been made, and no ſmall pains taken to confute, to expoſe, and to ridicule it. But after all the wit and buffoonery which have been laviſhed upon it, it may ſafely be affirmed, and might eaſily be ſhown, that it ſtands on firmer ground, and is encumbered with fewer difficulties than any other hypotheſis that has been yet propoſed.

But ſtill, as I have already obſerved, there remains another very important queſtion to be anſwered. Why is the wickedneſs of man, from whatever ſource it ſprings, ſuffered to paſs unobſerved and unpuniſhed by the Judge of all the earth? Why is not the bold offender ſtopped ſhort in his career of vice and iniquity? Why is he permitted to go on triumphantly, without any obſtacle to his wiſhes, to inſult, oppreſs, and haraſs the virtuous and the good, without the leaſt check or control, and, as it were to brave the vengeance of the Almighty, and ſet at nought the great Governor of the world? Why, in ſhort, in the language of the parable, are the tares allowed to grow up unmoleſted with the wheat, to choke its vigour and impede its growth? Why are they not plucked up inſtantly with an indignant hand, and thrown to the dung-hill, or committed to the flames?

This has been a moſt grievous "ſtumbling ſtone, a rock of offence," not only to the unthinking crowd, but to men of ſerious thought and reflection in every age; and ſcarce any thing has more perplexed and diſturbed the minds of the good, or given more encouragement or audacity to the bad, than the little notice that ſeems to be taken of the moſt enormous crimes, and the little diſtinction that is apparently made between "the wheat and the tares, between the righteous and the wicked, between him that ſerveth God and him that ſerveth him not."

The reflections which theſe myſterious proceedings are apt to excite even in the beſt and humbleſt of men, are

moſt inimitably expreſſed by the royal Pſalmiſt in the 73d Pſalm, where you ſee all the different turns and workings of his mind laid open without diſguiſe, and all the various ideas and ſentiments that ſucceſſively took poſſeſſion of his ſoul in the progreſs of his enquiry, deſcribed in the moſt natural and affecting manner. "Truly, ſays he (with that piety which conſtantly inſpires him) God is loving to Iſrael; even unto ſuch as are of a clean heart; nevertheleſs my feet were almoſt gone; my treadings had well nigh ſlipped. And why? I was grieved at the wicked; I do alſo ſee the ungodly in ſuch proſperity. For they are in no peril of death, but are luſty and ſtrong. They come in no misfortune like other folk; neither are they plagued like other men. And this is the cauſe, that they are ſo holden with pride, and overwhelmed with cruelty. Their eyes ſwell with fatneſs, and they do even what they luſt. They corrupt other, and ſpeak of wicked blaſphemy; their talking is againſt the Moſt High. Tuſh, ſay they, how ſhould God perceive it; is there knowledge in the Moſt High? Lo, theſe are the ungodly. Theſe proſper in the world, and theſe have riches in poſſeſſion. And I ſaid, then I have cleanſed my heart in vain, and waſhed my hands in innocency?"

Sentiments ſuch as theſe are, I believe, what many good men have found occaſionally riſing in their minds, on obſerving the proſperity of the worthleſs part of mankind. But never were they before ſo beautifully and ſo feelingly expreſſed as in this paſſage. Theſe complaints, however, ſoon paſs away with men of pious diſpoſitions, and end in meek ſubmiſſion to the will of Heaven. But not ſo with the wicked and profane. By them the forbearance of Heaven towards ſinners is ſometimes perverted to the very worſt purpoſes, and made uſe of as an argument to encourage and confirm them in the career of vice. This effect is well and accurately deſcribed in the book of Eccleſiaſtes. "Becauſe ſentence againſt an evil work is not executed ſpeedily, therefore the hearts of the ſons of men are fully ſet in them to do evil*."

* Eccles. viii. 11.

It was to obviate these fatal consequences, as well as to give support and consolation to the good, that our Lord delivered this parable of the tares and the wheat, which will enable us to solve the arduous question above-mentioned, arising from the impunity and prosperity of the wicked, and to vindicate in this instance the ways of God to man.

But before I begin to state and explain the reasons of that forbearance and lenity towards sinners, which is so much objected to in the divine administration of the world, I must take notice of one very material circumstance in the case, which is, that the evil complained of is greatly magnified, and represented to be much more generally prevalent than it really is. The fact is, that although punishment does not *always* overtake the wicked in this life, yet it falls upon them more frequently and heavily than we are aware of. They are often punished when we do not observe it; but they are also sometimes punished in the most public and conspicuous manner.

The very first offence committed by man after the creation of the world was, as we know to our cost, followed by immediate and exemplary punishment. The next great criminal, Cain, was rendered a fugitive and a vagabond upon earth, and held up as an object of execration and abhorrence to mankind. When the whole earth was sunk in wickedness, it was overwhelmed by a deluge. The abominations of Sodom and Gomorrah were avenged by fire from heaven. The tyrant Pharaoh and his host were drowned in the Red Sea. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and their rebellious companions, were buried alive in the bowels of the earth. It was for their portentous wickedness and savage practices that the Canaanite nations were exterminated by the Israelites; and it was for their idolatries, their licentiousness, and their rebellions against God, that the Israelites themselves were repeatedly driven into exile, reduced to slavery, and at length their city, their temple, and their whole civil polity utterly destroyed, and themselves scattered and dispersed over every part of the known world, and every where treated with derision and

contempt. It will be said, perhaps, that these were the consequences of the peculiar theocratic form of their government, under which the rewards and the punishments were temporal and immediate, and that they are not to be expected in the present state of human affairs. Still however they are proofs, and tremendous proofs, that God is not an inattentive and unconcerned spectator of human wickedness. But let us come to our own times, and to the fates and fortunes of individuals under our own observation. Do we not continually see that they who indulge their passions without control, and give an unbounded loose to every corrupt propensity of their hearts, are sooner or later the victims of their own intemperance and licentiousness? Do they not madly sacrifice to the love of pleasure, and frequently within a very short space of time, their health, their fortune, their characters, their peace of mind, and that too completely and effectually, and beyond all hopes of recovery? The instances of this are many and dreadful, without taking into the account such flagrant crimes as deliver men over into the hands of public justice. Now what is all this but the sentence of God speedily executed against evil works? It may be alledged, that these are only the natural consequences of wrong conduct, and not the immediate judicial inflictions of Heaven. But who is it that has made these evils the natural consequences of vice? Who but the great Author of nature? He hath purposely formed his world and his creature man in such a manner, that these penalties shall follow close upon wickedness, as a *present* mark of his abhorrence and detestation of it; and they fall on many offenders, both so speedily and so heavily, that till second thoughts correct the first impression, it seems almost an impeachment of his goodness that he inflicts them.

Still it must be confessed that wickedness is sometimes triumphant; and so also does folly sometimes meet with success in the world; but it is true notwithstanding, that it labors under great disadvantages, and immoral conduct under still greater. The *natural* tendency of sin is to misery. Accidents may now and then prevent this, but not generally; art and cunning may evade it, but not nearly so often as men imagine.

But ſuppoſing the guilty to eſcape for a time all ſufferings, and in conſequence of it, to pleaſe themſelves highly with the prudence of their choice; yet ſtill puniſhment, though ſlow, may overtake them at laſt. The blindneſs of ſuch men to conſequences is quite aſtoniſhing. One man evades the penalties of human laws in a few inſtances, and therefore concludes he ſhall never be overtaken by them. Another preſerves his reputation for a time, and thence imagines it to be perfectly ſecure. A third finds his health hold out a few years, and therefore has not the leaſt ſuſpicion that what he is always undermining muſt fall at laſt.

Now each of theſe may, if he pleaſes, applaud his own wiſdom; but every one elſe muſt ſee his extreme ſtupidity and folly. In fact, whoever commits ſin has ſwallowed poiſon, which from that moment begins to operate; at firſt perhaps by a pleaſing intoxication, afterward by ſlow and uncertain degrees, but ſtill the diſeaſe is within, and is mortal; and ſince it may every inſtant break out with fatal violence, it is a melancholy thing to ſee the perſon infected filled with a mad joy, which muſt end in heavineſs and death.

Vice, eſpecially of ſome ſorts, affects to wear a ſmiling countenance, and the days that are ſpent in it paſs along for a time pleaſantly enough; but little do the poor wretches that are deluded by it reflect what bitterneſs they are treaſuring up for the reſt of life, and how ſoon they may come to taſte it in ſuch conſequences, as even the compleateſt reformation, and the ſtricteſt care afterwards, will very imperfectly either prevent or cure.

After all, however, it muſt be acknowledged, that there are numbers of worthleſs and profligate men, who go on for a conſiderable length of time, perhaps even to the end of their days, in a full tide of worldly proſperity, bleſſed with every thing that is thought moſt valuable in this life, wealth, power, rank, health and ſtrength, and enjoying all theſe advantages without interruption and alloy, "coming in no misfortune like other folk, and not plagued or afflicted like other men."

These, it must be confessed, are strong symptoms of happiness, if we are to judge from appearance only. But does not every one know that happiness depends infinitely less upon external circumstances than on the internal comfort, content, and satisfaction of the mind! May I not appeal to every one here present, whether some of the acutest sufferings, and the most exquisite joys he has experienced, are not those which are confined to his own breast, which he enjoys in secrecy and in silence, in his retired and private moments, unobserved by the world, and independent on all exterior show? "The heart only (says the wise man most truly) knoweth its own bitterness, and a stranger doth not intermeddle with its joy*." This then is the standard by which you must measure human happiness. You must not too hastily conclude that prosperity is felicity. In order to know whether these men are truly what they seem to be, you must follow them into their retirements, into their closets, and to their couches; and if you could then see the interior of their hearts, you would probably find them objects rather of pity than of envy. Whatever they may pretend, or whatever air of cheerfulness they may assume, it is utterly impossible that they, whose sole object is to gratify their passions without the least regard to the feelings of others; who are corrupting all around them by their conversation and their example, or spreading ruin, misery, and desolation over the world by their inordinate ambition; who not only live in a constant violation of the commands of their Maker, but perhaps even deny his existence, renounce his authority, and treat every thing serious and religious with derision and contempt: it is, I say, utterly impossible that these men, whatever external magnificence or gaiety may surround them, can enjoy that peace and comfort and content of mind, which alone constitutes real and substantial happiness, and without which every thing else is insipid and unsatisfactory. A secret consciousness that they are acting wrong, that they are degrading and debasing their nature, and wasting their time in mean, unworthy, and mischievous pursuits; frequent pangs of remorse

* Prov. xiv. 10.

for the irreparable injuries they have done to thoſe whom they have betrayed or oppreſſed, and whoſe peace and comfort they have for ever deſtroyed; a dread of that Almighty Being whom they have reſiſted and inſulted; a fear of death, and an apprehenſion of that puniſhment hereafter, which, though they affect to diſbelieve and deſpiſe, they cannot help knowing to be poſſible, and feeling that they deſerve; all theſe reflections, which, in ſpite of their utmoſt efforts to ſtifle them, will very often force themſelves upon their minds, are ſufficient to counteract every other advantage they poſſeſs, and to embitter every enjoyment of their lives. All ſhall look outwardly gay and happy, and all within ſhall be joyleſs and gloomy. They ſhall ſeem to have every thing they wiſh, and in fact, have nothing that affords them any genuine ſatisfaction, or preſerves them from the internal wretchedneſs that perpetually haunts them. "God (as the Pſalmiſt expreſſes it) gives them their hearts deſire, and ſends *leanneſs* withal into their ſouls*;" that is, a total incapacity of deriving any true comfort from the bleſſings they poſſeſs.

I am not here drawing imaginary pictures of miſery, or deſcribing ſituations which have never exiſted; I could refer you to well-known examples, which could amply confirm the truth of my aſſertions, and would clearly ſhow that the proſperity of the wicked is no proof of their happineſs; that external calamities and corporeal pains, acute ſufferings, diſeaſe, or death, are not the only inſtruments of vengeance which the Almighty has in his hand for the correction of ſinners; but that he has other engines of puniſhment far more terrible than theſe; that he can plant daggers in the breaſt of the moſt triumphant libertine; and that even when their worldly bleſſings are exalted, his ſecret dart can pierce their ſouls, and wring them with tortures ſharper than a two-edged ſword, yet inviſible to every mortal eye†.

* Pſalm cvi. 15.

† "As malefactors, when they go to puniſhment, carry their own croſs, ſo wickedneſs generally carries its own torment along with it, and is a moſt ſkilful artificer of its own miſery, filling the mind with terror, remorſe, and the moſt agonizing reflection." Plut. Ed. Xyland. v. 2. p. 554. A.

It appears, therefore, that ſinners are in fact much oftener and much more ſeverely puniſhed than we are aware; that God is even now exerciſing a moral government over the world; that he is filling them with the fruits of their own devices, and chaſtening them in a variety of ways, not always diſcernible by us; admoniſhing ſome by gentle corrections to ſin no more, leſt a worſe thing come unto them; but cruſhing ſome by ſeverer ſtrokes, "that others may hear and fear, and do no more any ſuch wickedneſs*."

Still however it muſt be owned, that puniſhment does not always overtake the offender either ſpeedily or immediately; and therefore I proceed to ſhow, that when this is the caſe, there are ſufficient reaſons for the delay.

It is obvious that every ſcheme which comprehends a great variety of intentions and views, cannot permit all of them to be accompliſhed at once, but ſome things, by no means to be omitted entirely, muſt however be poſtponed. Now ſuch a complicated ſyſtem is that of the government of the world, in which God may have many deſigns altogether unknown to us; and of thoſe which we know beſt, we are far from being judges which it is right for him to prefer, whenever they happen to interfere†. Offenders, whom *we* are impatient to ſee puniſhed as they deſerve, he may ſee it expedient, for various reaſons, to ſpare. One of theſe reaſons is given in the parable before us. When the ſervants of the houſeholder repreſented to him that there was a great number of tares intermixed and growing up with the wheat, and aſked whether they ſhould not go and root them up: his anſwer was, *nay; leſt* while ye gather up the tares, ye root up the wheat alſo with them. The meaning is, that in the preſent imperfect ſcene of things, the virtuous and the wicked are ſo

* Deut. xiii. 11.

† "It is as abſurd for us to blame the gods for not puniſhing the wicked at the time and in the manner which we think the fitteſt, as it would be for an ignorant clown to cenſure a phyſician for not adminiſtering the moſt efficacious medicines to his patient at thoſe times which he, the ſaid clown, judges to be the moſt proper." Plut. v. 2. p. 549. F.

intermingled and ſo connected with each other, that it is frequently impoſſible to puniſh the guilty without involving the innocent in their ſufferings. In the caſe of ſinful nations, or any large bodies of men, this is very apparent. It may happen that a very conſiderable part of a great community may be guilty of the moſt enormous crimes, of oppreſſion, injuſtice, ambition, cruelty, murder, and impiety, and we are apt to call out for immediate and exemplary vengeance on ſuch wretches as theſe. But if this vengeance was to be executed in all its extent, if this people was to be extirpated by fire and ſword, or to be deſtroyed by famine, by peſtilence, or earthquake, it is evident that great numbers of innocent perſons muſt periſh in this general wreck, and that the wheat would be rooted up with the tares. Inſtead therefore of cenſuring the diſpenſations of the Almighty in theſe inſtances, we ought to praiſe and adore him for exerciſing his mercy when we ſhould have no compaſſion, and for ſparing the wicked leſt he ſhould deſtroy the righteous.

But though this reaſoning may be allowed in the caſe of guilty nations, yet it may be thought not to hold good with reſpect to individuals. It may be alledged, that ſingle offenders at leaſt may be cut off, without doing any injury to the innocent or the virtuous. But is this a fact which can at all times be ſafely aſſumed? Is the criminal, whom you wiſh to ſee chaſtiſed, a perfectly unconnected, ſolitary, and iſolated being? Has he no wife or children, no relations, no dependents, no perſons of any deſcription, that look up to him for protection, ſupport, or aſſiſtance? If he has, are you ſure that all theſe perſons are as worthleſs and as deſerving of correction as himſelf? May they not, on the contrary, be as eminent in virtue as he is in wickedneſs; or at the leaſt, may they not be exempt from many of thoſe flagrant ſins that call for immediate and exemplary puniſhment? If ſo, would you have theſe innocent, and perhaps excellent perſons, involved in the ruin of the great delinquent, on whom they entirely depend? Would you have the righteous Governor of the univerſe make no diſtinction in the infliction of his puniſhments? Should we not rather adopt the pathetic language

of Abraham, when he is pleading with the Almighty for Sodom and Gomorrah? "Wilt thou ſlay the righteous with the wicked? That be far from thee. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" You ſee then that there may be the beſt and moſt ſubſtantial reaſons for delaying the puniſhment of the wicked, both with reſpect to nations and individuals; and that when *we* are raſhly calling out for immediate vengeance, the Judge of all the earth is full of tenderneſs and pity, and ſees the beſt reaſons for reſpiting even the moſt notorious offenders.

But beſides this, there are other reaſons for God's forbearance towards ſinners. They are ſometimes, as the prophet expreſſes it, *the rod of his anger*†. He makes uſe of them as inſtruments to chaſtiſe each other, or to correct the faults of thoſe who are much better than themſelves. And it frequently happens that their puniſhment is only delayed till they have completely finiſhed the work for which they were raiſed up, and that then they are made to juſtify the diſpenſations of the Almighty by the awful ſpectacle of a conſpicuous and terrifying fall.

To inſtance only the caſe of one notorious offender. That miſcreant Judas Iſcariot, long before he betrayed his maſter, gave proofs of a moſt depraved and corrupt diſpoſition. He was intruſted with the little ſtock that belonged in common to our Lord and the apoſtles; he kept the bag, and he robbed it. This flagrant breach of truſt certainly deſerved the ſevereſt puniſhment; and no doubt the diſciples ſecretly murmured in their hearts, and condemned their divine maſter for too great lenity towards ſo vile a wretch. But they knew not what *he* knew, that he was reſerved for an important, though nefarious purpoſe, and was to be the inſtrument of betraying the Saviour of the world into the hands of his murderers, a deed for which his former crimes ſhowed him to be perfectly well qualified. When this work of darkneſs was done, his doom was ſealed, his puniſhment inſtantly followed; and, what increaſed its bitterneſs, it was inflicted with his own hand.

* Gen. xviii. 25. † Iſaiah x. 5.

There is ſtill another very important conſideration, which may frequently occaſion a delay in puniſhing even grievous offenders; and that is, the goodneſs and long-ſuffering of God, who is not willing that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould have time for repentance.

He who looks into the hearts of men, may ſee various reaſons for ſparing thoſe whom we would conſign to immediate deſtruction. He may diſcern ſome good qualities in them which are unknown to us, ſome good diſpoſitions and good principles, which have entirely eſcaped our obſervation. He may perceive that they have been betrayed into the crimes they have committed, more by unfortunate circumſtances, by error of judgment, by miſtaken zeal, by wrong education, by the ſolicitation and the influence of worthleſs companions, than by an incurable and inveterate depravity of heart. He may ſee, that amidſt a multitude of vile weeds, there are ſtill ſome ſeeds of virtue remaining in their breaſts, which, if duly cheriſhed and foſtered, and cultivated with care and tenderneſs, may produce moſt valuable fruits of righteouſneſs. "He is unwilling therefore to break the bruiſed reed, or to quench the ſmoking flax*." He is unwilling to deſtroy what may ſtill poſſibly be reſtored; he is unwilling to extinguiſh, by ſeverity, the faineſt ſparks of latent goodneſs. He ſees, in ſhort, that if they have time for reflection, if they have ſpace for repentance, they *will* repent, and he graciouſly gives them a reſpite for that purpoſe†.

* Matth. xii. 20.

† "Thoſe offenders whom the Deity knows to be abſolutely incurable, he deſtroys; but to thoſe in whom he diſcovers ſome good diſpoſitions, and a probability of reformation, he gives time for amendment. Thus by immediate puniſhment he corrects a *few*, but by ſometimes delaying it he recovers and reforms *many*." Plut. v. 2 p. 551. C. D.

To this may be added another fine obſervation of the ſame author; "that God is ſometimes ſlow in puniſhing the wicked, in order to teach us mortals a leſſon of moderation; to repreſs that vehemence and precipitation with which we are ſometimes impelled to avenge ourſelves on thoſe that offend us in the firſt heat of our paſſion immediately and immoderately? and to induce us to imitate that mildneſs, patience, and forbearance, which HE is often ſo merciful as to exerciſe towards thoſe that have incurred his diſpleaſure." P. 550. F.

And shall we repine or murmur at this forbearance, this indulgence of God towards sinners? Are not we ourselves all of us sinners, miserable sinners: and do we think that God treats *us* with too much indulgence? Is there any one here present who would be content that God should immediately, and without mercy, inflict on him the utmost punishment which his sins justly deserve? What, alas! would become of the very best of us, if this was the case; and who could abide these judgments of the Lord? And how then can we refuse to others that mercy of which we stand so much in need ourselves?

It is evident, and we see it every day, that men who once were profligate have in time become eminently virtuous; and what pity would it have been if extreme or untimely severity had either suddenly cut them off, or hardened them in their wickedness! Great minds are sometimes apt to fly out into excesses at their first outset, but afterwards, upon reflection, and with proper culture, rise up to the practice of the noblest virtues. And it is mercy worthy of God to exercise, and which men instead of censuring ought to admire and adore, if he chooses the milder, though slower methods, with those who are capable of being reformed by them. These sentiments cannot be better illustrated than by the example of St. Paul. That illustrious apostle was we know once, as he himself confesses, *the chief of sinners*; he was a fiery zealot, and a furious persecutor of the first Christians, breathing out continually threatening and slaughter against them, making havoc of the Church, entering into every house, and hauling men and women to prison; and being, as he expresses it, exceedingly mad against them, he persecuted them unto strange cities, and when they were put to death, he gave his voice against them. In the eye of the Christian world then at that time, he must have been considered as one of the fittest objects of divine vengeance, as a persecutor and a murderer, who ought to be cut off in an instant from the face of the earth.

But the great Discerner of Hearts thought otherwise. He saw that all this cruelty, great as it undoubtedly was,

arose, not from a disposition naturally savage and ferocious, but from ignorance, from early religious prejudices, from misguided zeal, from a firm persuasion that by these acts of severity against the first Christians he was doing God service. He saw that this same fervor of mind, this excess of zeal, properly informed and properly directed, would make him a most active and able advocate of that very cause which he had so violently opposed. Instead therefore of an extraordinary act of power to destroy him, he visibly interposed to save him. He was in a miraculous manner converted to the Christian faith, and became the principal instrument of diffusing it through the world. We see then what baneful effects would sometimes arise from the immediate punishment even of notorious delinquents. It would in this case have deprived the Christian world of the abilities, the eloquence, the indefatigable and successful exertions of this learned and intrepid apostle, whose conversion gave a strong additional evidence to the truth of the Gospel, and who laid down his life for the religion he had embraced.

Yet notwithstanding all the reasons for sometimes delaying the punishment of guilt in the present world, it cannot be denied that there are some instances of prosperous wickedness, which cannot well be accounted for by any of them; and therefore, for a complete vindication of the moral government of God, we must have recourse to the concluding part of the parable, which will give us the fullest satisfaction on this interesting subject. To the question of the servants, whether they should gather up the tares from the midst of the wheat, the householder answers, "nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up the wheat also. Let both grow together until the harvest, and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn." The harvest, our Lord tells us in his explanation, is the end of the world, at which awful period the Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall "gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall

be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear*."

Here then is the great master-key to the whole of this mysterious dispensation of Heaven. God we see, has appointed a day when every deficiency in his administration shall be supplied, and every seeming disproportion and inequality shall be rectified†.

Even in this world it appears that wickedness is punished in some measure, and to a certain degree; and we have seen that the interests of virtue itself, among other considerations, require that it should not be instantly punished to the full extent of its deserts. God is perpetually showing, even in the present life, his different regard to right and wrong, by every such method as the constitution of the world which he has created admits; and therefore no sooner shall that world come to an end, and all obstacles to an equal administration of justice be taken out of the way, than he shall come to execute righteous judgment upon earth.

"He is not slack as men count slackness‡," that is negligent and remiss; he only waits for the proper season of doing all that hitherto remains undone. Human weakness indeed, by a small delay of punishing, may lose the power of doing it for ever. "But in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength§." Human inconstancy may be vehement and passionate at first; then negligent and languid. The sense of an unworthy action that does not injure us, quickly wears out of our mind; and if we take no immediate notice of it, we shall possibly take none at

* Matth. xiii. 41, 42, 43.

† "As the soul survives the dissolution of the body (says the excellent Plutarch) and exists after death, it is most probable that it will receive rewards and punishments in a future state; for it goes through a kind of contest during the present life, and when that is over, it will have its due recompence hereafter." 561. A.

How nearly does this approach to the doctrine of the Gospel, which had been promulgated nearly one hundred years before Plutarch wrote. But thanks be to God, what this great man thought only probable, we have the happiness of knowing to be certain.

‡ 2 Pet. iii. 9. § Isaiah xxvi. 4.

all. But we must not think God to be such an one as ourselves. Eternity itself will make no change in *his* abhorrence of wickedness, nor will any thing either transport him to act before his appointed time, or prevail upon him to give a respite when that time comes. The sinners of the antediluvian world, abusing the long space of one hundred and twenty years which he allowed for their repentance, perished at the end of it without mercy. The angels who fell from their first estate before this earth was created, he has reserved for torments, that shall not finally take place till it is consumed*.

The same important period his infinite wisdom has marked out for the final judgment of men. And undoubtedly it *may* produce advantages of unspeakable moment thus to defer justice, with a design of rendering some chosen parts of duration memorable throughout the universe, by a more extensive and illustrious exercise of it. For it must needs make an inconceivable strong and lasting impression upon every order of beings that shall then be present at the solemn scene, to hear the final doom of a whole world pronounced at once; and to behold sins that had been committed thousands of years before, punished with the same attention to every circumstance as if they had been but of yesterday.

How far off these judgments of the Lord may be, we none of us know. But with regard to ourselves, they are near, they are even at the door. The few days we have to pass in this transient scene will determine our condition for ever, and bring us into an eternal state, compared with which the continuence of the present frame of nature, from its very beginning, will be as nothing. Then every act of the government of God will be seen in its true light; the imagined length of distance between guilt and its punishment will totally disappear; and offenders will lament in vain that sentence is executed *so speedily* as it is against evil works. But with peculiar severity will it be executed on them, who despising the riches of that goodness which would lead them to repentance, "treasure up for themselves wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God†."

* Jude vi. 2 Pet. ii. 4. † Rom. ii. 5.

Upon the whole then let not either the ſinner triumph, or the virtuous repine, at the apparent impunity or even proſperity of the wicked in the preſent life. To the audacious ſinner we apply thoſe moſt oppoſite and moſt awful words of the ſon of Sirach. "Say not who ſhall control me for my works, for the Lord ſhall ſurely avenge thy pride. Say not I have ſinned, and what harm hath happened unto me; for the Lord is indeed long-ſuffering, but he will in no wiſe let thee go. Say not, his mercy is great, he will be pacified for the multitude of my ſins; for both mercy and wrath come from him, and his indignation reſteth upon ſinners. Make therefore no tarrying to turn unto the Lord, and put not off from day to day; for ſuddenly ſhall the wrath of the Lord come forth, and in thy ſecurity ſhalt thou be deſtroyed, and periſh in the day of vengeance*."

To the religious and virtuous on the other hand we ſay, "Fret not thyſelf becauſe of the ungodly, neither be thou envious againſt the evil doers. Hold thee ſtill in the Lord, and abide patiently upon him; but grieve not thyſelf at him whoſe way doth proſper, againſt the man that doeth after evil counſels. Wicked doers ſhall be rooted out; and they that patiently abide the Lord, thoſe ſhall inherit the land†." "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold the huſbandman waiteth for the precious fruits of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and the latter rain. Be ye alſo patient for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh‡."

It is not indeed always an eaſy taſk to exerciſe this patience, when we ſee conſpicuous inſtances either of individuals or of nations, notorious for their profligacy, triumphant and proſperous in all their ways. We can ſcarce repreſs our diſcontent, or forbear joining with the prophet in his expoſtulation with the Almighty, "Righteous art thou, O Lord! yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments. Why do the ways of the wicked proſper? Why are all they happy that deal very treacherouſly||?" To

* Eccles. v. 6.
† Pſalm xxxvii. 7.
‡ James v. 7.
|| Jerem. xii. 1.

this we can now anſwer in the words of Job: "Knoweſt thou not this, ſince man was placed upon the earth, that the triumphing of the wicked is ſhort, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment. Though his excellency mount unto the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds, yet he ſhall periſh for ever, and they that have ſeen him ſhall ſay, where is he*?"

In fact it has been proved, in the courſe of this enquiry, that in ſuch an immenſe and complicated ſyſtem as that of the univerſe, there are many reaſons which we can diſcern, and a thouſand others perhaps totally unknown to us, which render it neceſſary that the virtuous ſhould ſuffer a temporary depreſſion, and the wicked enjoy a temporary triumph. But let not theſe apparent irregularities diſpirit or diſcourage us: for whenever the purpoſes of Providence in theſe myſterious diſpenſations ſhall have been accompliſhed, every diſorder ſhall be rectified, and every appearance of injuſtice done away. The time and the ſeaſon for doing this God has reſerved in his own power: and we muſt not preſume to preſcribe rules to the wiſdom of the Almighty. To men excruciated with pain, every moment ſeems an age; and to men groaning under oppreſſion, their deliverance, if it come not inſtantly, may ſeem extremely diſtant. But let them not diſpair: in due ſeaſon they ſhall reap if they faint not. At the period marked out by infinite wiſdom, and which it is their duty to await with patience, God ſhall cauſe his judgment to be heard from heaven, and the earth ſhall tremble and be ſtill. He ſhall then demonſtrate to the whole world "that his hand is not ſhortened that it cannot redeem, and that he ſtill retains the power to ſave†." He ſhall prove, in a manner the moſt awful and moſt ſatisfactory, "that verily there is a reward for the righteous, and a puniſhment for the wicked; that doubtleſs there is a God that judgeth the earth‡."

* Job xx. 5. † Iſaiah, x, 2. ‡ Pſalm lviii. 10.

LECTURE XIV.

MATTHEW xiv.

WE are now, in the courſe of theſe Lectures, arrived at the fourteenth chapter of St. Matthew, which begins in the following manner:

"At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jeſus, and ſaid unto his ſervants, this is John the Baptiſt; he is riſen from the dead; and therefore mighty works do ſhew forth themſelves in him; for Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in priſon, for Herodias ſake, his brother Philip's wife; for John ſaid unto him, it is not lawful for thee to have her. And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, becauſe they counted him as a prophet. But when Herod's birth-day was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleaſed Herod; whereupon he promiſed with an oath, that he would give her whatſoever ſhe would aſk; and ſhe, being before inſtructed of her mother, ſaid, give me here John Baptiſt's head in a charger. And the king was ſorry; nevertheleſs, for the oath's ſake, and them which ſat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her, and he ſent and beheaded John in the priſon; and his head was brought in a charger, and given to the damſel; and ſhe brought it to her mother; and his diſciples came and took up the body and buried it, and went and told Jeſus."

Before we enter upon this remarkable and affecting narrative of the murder of John the Baptiſt by Herod, it will be proper to take notice of the two firſt verſes of this chapter, which gave occaſion to the introduction of that tranſaction in this place, although it had happened ſome time before.

"At that time, says the evangelist, Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus, and said unto his servants, this is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead; and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him."

It is not easy to meet with a more striking instance than this of the force of conscience over a guilty mind, or a stronger proof how perpetually it goads the sinner, not only with well-grounded fears and appehensions of impending punishment and vengeance, but with imaginary terrors and visionary dangers.

No sooner did the fame of Jesus reach the ears of the tyrant Herod, than it immediately occurred to his mind that he had himself, not long before, most cruelly and wantonly put to death an innocent, virtuous, and holy man, whose reputation for wisdom, integrity, and sanctity of manners, stood almost as high in the estimation of the world as that of Jesus; and who had even declared himself the herald and the forerunner of that extraordinary person. This instantly suggested to him an idea the most extravagant that could be imagined, that this very person who assumed the name of Jesus was in fact no other than John the Baptist himself, whom he had beheaded, and who was now risen from the dead, and was endowed with the power of working miracles, though he never performed any when living. It is evident, that nothing could be more improbable and absurd than these suppositions, nothing more contrary even to his own principles; for there is reason to believe that Herod, like most other people of high rank at that time, was of the sect called the Sadducees, a sect which rejected the immortality of the soul, and the doctrine of a resurrection, and must therefore be perfectly adverse to the strange imagination of John the Baptist being risen from the dead.—Yet the fears of Herod overruled all the prejudices of his sect, and raised up before his eyes the semblance of the murdered Baptist armed with the power of miracles, for the very purpose (he perhaps imagined) of inflicting exemplary vengeance upon him for that atrocious deed, as well as for his adultery, his incest, and all his other crimes: which now probably presented themselves in their

moſt hideous forms to his terrified imagination, purſued him into his moſt ſecret retirements, and tortured his breaſt with unceaſing agonies.

The evangeliſt having thus introduced the mention of John the Baptiſt, goes back a little in his narrative, to make the reader acquainted with that part of the Baptiſt's hiſtory which brought down upon him the indignation of Herod, and was the occaſion of his death.

This flagitious prince had, it ſeems, in the face of day, and in defiance of all laws, human and divine, committed the complicated crime of adultery and inceſt, attended with every circumſtance that could mark an abandoned and unprincipled mind.

He had been married a conſiderable time to the daughter of Aretas, king of Arabia Petræa, but conceiving a violent paſſion for his brother Philip's, wife, Herodias, he firſt ſeduced her affections from her huſband, then diſmiſſed his own wife, and married Herodias, during the life-time of his brother. It was impoſſible that ſuch portentous wickedneſs as this could eſcape the obſervation or the reproof of the holy Baptiſt. He had the honeſty and the courage to reproach the tyrant with the enormity of his guilt, although he could not be ignorant of the danger he incurred by ſuch a meaſure; but he determined to do his duty, and to take the conſequences. The conſequences were, "that Herod laid hold of John, and bound him, and threw him into priſon*." And undoubtedly his wiſh was to have put him immediately to death, but he was reſtrained by two conſiderations. The firſt was, becauſe John was held in ſuch high eſteem and veneration by all the people, that had any violence been offered to him by Herod, he was apprehenſive that it might have occaſioned a general inſurrection againſt his government; for we are informed by St. Matthew that "he feared the multitude, becauſe they counted John as a prophet†."

The other reaſon was, that although he felt the utmoſt indignation and reſentment againſt John for the freedom he had uſed in reproaching him for his licentious conduct,

* Matth. xiv, 3. † Matth. xiv. 5.

yet at the same time the character of that excellent man, his piety, his sanctity, his integrity, his disinterestedness, nay, even the courage which had so much offended and provoked him, commanded his respect and veneration, and excited his fears; for we are told expressly that *Herod feared John, knowing* he was a just man and a holy*.—Nor is this all, he not only feared John, but in some degree paid court to him. He frequently sent for him out of prison, and conversed with him, and, as the evangelist expresses it, *observed* him; that is, listened to him with attention and with pleasure; nay he went farther still, *he did many things*, many things which John exhorted and enjoined him to do†. He perhaps showed more attention to many of his public duties, more gentleness to his subjects, more compassion to the poor, more equity in his judicial determinations, more regard to public worship; and vainly hoped perhaps, like many other audacious sinners, that this partial reformation, this half-way amendment, would avert the judgments with which John probably threatened him. But the *main* point, the great object of John's reprehension, the incestuous adultery in which he lived, *that* he could not part with; it was too precious, too favorite a sin to give up; too great a sacrifice to make to conscience and to God.

What a picture does this hold out to us of that strange thing called human nature, of that inconsistence, that contradiction, that contrariety, which sometimes take place in the heart of man, unsanctified and unsubdued by the power of divine grace! and what an exalted idea at the same time does it give us of the dignity of a truly religious character, like that of John, which compels even its bitterest enemies to reverence and to fear it; and forces even the most profligate and most powerful of men to pay an unwilling homage to excellence, at the very moment, perhaps, when they are meditating its destruction!

In this state of irresolution Herod might probably have continued, and the fate of John have remained undecided for a considerable time, had not an incident taken place, which determined both much sooner perhaps than was in-

* Mark, vi. 20. † Mark, vi. 20.

tended, Herod, on his birth-day, gave an entertainment to the principal officers of his army and of his court; and as a peculiar and very uncommon compliment on the occasion, Salome, the daughter of his wife Herodias by her former husband, came in and danced before the company in a manner so pleasing to Herod and to all his guests, that the king in a sudden transport of delight, cried out to the damsel, as St. Mark relates it, "Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee." And he swore unto her, "whatsoever thou shalt ask of me I will give it thee even unto the half of my kingdom*." The folly, the rashness, and the madness of such an oath as this, on so foolish an occasion, could be exceeded by nothing but the horrible purpose to which it was perverted by the young creature to whom it was made, or rather by her profligate instructor and adviser, her mother Herodias. Astonished and overwhelmed probably with the magnitude of such an unexpected offer, which laid at her feet half the wealth, the power and the splendor of a kingdom, she found herself unable to decide between the various dazzling objects that would present themselves to her imagination, and therefore very naturally applies to her mother for advice and direction. Most mothers, on such an occasion, would have asked for a daughter a magnificent establishment, a situation of high rank and power! But Herodias had a passion to gratify, stronger perhaps than any other, when it takes full possession of the human heart, and that was revenge. She had been mortally injured, as she conceived, by the Baptist, who had attempted to dissolve her present infamous connection with Herod. And she not only felt the highest indignation at this insult, but was afraid that his repeated remonstrances might at length prevail. She therefore did not hesitate one moment what to ask; she gave way to all the fury of her resentment; and without the least regard to the character or the delicate situation of her inexperienced daughter, she immediately ordered her to demand the head of her detested enemy, John the Baptist! The wretched young woman unfortunately obeyed this dreadful command; and, as we are told by the evangelist, "came in straightway with haste unto the king†." She came with speed in her steps, and

* Mark, vi. 22, 23. † Mark, vi. 25. Matth. xiv. 8.

eagerneſs in her eye, and ſaid, "Give me here John the Baptiſt's head in a charger." This ſavage requeſt appalled even the unfeeling heart of Herod himſelf. He did not expect it, and was not prepared for it; and although he was highly diſguſted with John, yet, for the reaſons above mentioned, he did not chooſe to go to extremities with him. He was therefore *exceeding ſorry*, as the ſacred Hiſtorian informs us, to be thus forced upon ſo violent and hazardous a meaſure; nevertheleſs, for his oath's ſake, and them which ſat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given to her." Conceiving himſelf, moſt abſurdly, bound by his oath to comply even with this inhuman demand, and afraid leſt he ſhould be reproached by thoſe that were around him with having broken his promiſe, he prefered the real guilt of murder to the falſe imputation of perjury, and "ſent and beheaded John in priſon; and his head was brought in a charger, and given to the damſel, and ſhe brought it to her mother."—It is well known that it was a cuſtom in the eaſt, and is ſo ſtill in the Turkiſh court, to produce the heads of thoſe that are ordered to be put to death, as a proof that they have been really executed. But how this wretched damſel could ſo far ſubdue the common feelings of human nature, and ſtill more the natural tenderneſs and delicacy of her ſex, as not only to endure ſo diſguſting and ſhocking a ſpectacle, but even to carry the bleeding trophy in triumph to her mother, it is not eaſy to imagine; and it would ſcarce be credited, did we not know that in times and in countries much nearer to our own, ſights of ſtill greater horror than this have been contemplated, even by women and children, with complacency and with delight.

Such was the concluſion of this ſingular tranſaction; and every part of it is ſo pregnant with uſeful inſtruction and admonition, that I ſhall ſtand excuſed, I hope, if I take up a little more of your time than is uſual in diſcourſes of this nature, in commenting ſomewhat at large on the conduct and characters of the ſeveral actors in this dreadful tragedy.

And, in the firſt place, there can be no doubt that the moſt guilty and the moſt unpardonable of all the parties concerned in this murder of an innocent and excellent man

was the abandoned Herodias. For it was she whose indignation against John was carried to the greatest length, and in the end effected his ruin. It was she who was continually importuning and urging Herod to put the Baptist to death, from which, for a considerable time, his fears restrained him. It was she who, as St. Mark expresses it, "*had a quarrel* against John, and would have killed him, but she could not*." The words translated, *had a quarrel against him*, have in the original much greater force and energy, *Eneichen autō*. She, as it were, fastened and hung upon John, and was determined not to let go her hold till she had destroyed him†.

We here see a fatal proof of the extreme barbarities to which that most diabolical sentiment of revenge will drive the natural tenderness even of a female mind; what a close connection there is between crimes of apparently a very different complexion, and how frequently the uncontrolled indulgence of what are called the softer affections, lead ultimately to the most violent excesses of the malignant passions. The voluptuary generally piques himself on his benevolence, his humanity, and gentleness of disposition. His claim even to these virtues is at the best very problematical; because in his pursuit of pleasure, he makes no scruple of sacrificing the peace, the comfort, the happiness of those for whom he pretends the tenderest affection, to the gratification of his own selfish desires.—But however he may preserve his good humour, when he meets with no resistance, the moment he is thwarted and opposed in his flagitious purposes, he has no hesitation in going any lengths to gain his point, and will fight his way to the object he has in view through the heart of the very best friend he has in the world. The same thing we see in a still more striking point of view, in the conduct of Herodias. She was at first only a bold unprincipled libertine, and might perhaps be admired and celebrated, as many others of that discription have been, for her good temper, her sensibility, her generosity to the poor; and with this

* Mark, vi. 19.

† Hesychius explains *enephei* by *elkeitai, sticks close to* in hatred or spite. Doddridge gives still greater force to the expression; but Parkhurst does not allow it.

character she might have gone out of the world, had no such person as John arisen to reprove her and her husband for their profligacy, and to endanger the continuance of her guilty commerce. But no sooner does he rebuke them as they deserved, than Herodias shewed that she had other passions to indulge besides those which had hitherto disgraced her character; and that, when she found it necessary to her pleasures, she could be as cruel as she had been licentious; could contrive and accomplish the destruction of a great and good man, could feast her eyes with the sight of his mangled head in a charger, could even make her own poor child the instrument of her vengeance, and, as I am inclined to think, a *reluctant* accomplice in a most atrocious murder.

Here is a most awful lesson held out, not only to the female sex, but to both sexes, to persons of all ages and conditions, to beware of giving way to any one evil propensity in their nature, however it may be disguised under popular names, however indulgently it may be treated by the world, however it may be authorized by the general practice of mankind; because they here see that they may not only be led into the grossest extravagancies of that individual passion, but may also be insensibly betrayed into the commission of crimes of the deepest dye, which in their serious moments they always contemplated with the utmost horror.

Let us now take our leave of this wretched woman, and turn our attention for a moment to her unhappy daughter. Here undoubtedly there is much to blame, but there is also something to pity and to lament. Her youth, her inexperience, her unfortunate situation in a most corrupt court, the vile example that was constantly before her eyes, the influence, the authority, the commands of a profligate mother, these are circumstances that plead powerfully for compassion, and tend in some degree to mitigate her guilt. Her first fault evidently was that gross violation of all decorum, and all custom too, in appearing and dancing publicly before Herod and a large number of his friends assembled at a festive meeting, and perhaps half intoxicated with wine. But it is not probable that a young woman of high rank, and so very tender an age as she seems

to have been, should have *voluntarily* taken such a step as this, or should have been able to subdue at once all the modesty and the timidity of her sex, and acquire courage enough to encounter the eyes and the observations of so licentious an assembly. There can be little doubt, that she was wrought upon by the persuasions of her artful mother, who flattered herself that this artifice might produce some such effect in the mind of Herod as actually followed. What adds great weight to this conjecture is, that her next dreadful transgression, her singular and sanguinary request to have the head of John the Baptist presented to her, was unquestionably the suggestion of the abandoned Herodias.

The sacred historian expressly informs us, that it was in consequence of being *before instructed* of her mother that she made this demand. Nor is this all; there is great reason to believe that it was with the utmost difficulty she was prevailed on to comply with the injunctions that were given her; for the original words *probibasthoisa upo tēs mētros*, which we translate *before instructed of her mother*, more strictly signify being *wrought upon*, *instigated*, and *impelled* by her mother; for this is the sense in which that expression is used by the best Greek writers.

This supposition receives no small confirmation from the manner in which she is represented by the evangelist as delivering her answer to Herod. "She came straightway with haste unto the king;" she betrayed on her return the utmost emotion and agitation of mind. She had worked herself up to a resolution of obeying her mother; and was in haste to execute her commission, lest if any pause had intervened her heart should relent, her spirits fail her, and she should not have courage to utter the dreadful demand she had to make.

All this seems to imply great reluctance on her part, and evidently is a considerable alleviation of her crime; yet does by no means exempt her from all guilt. For although obedience to parents is a very sacred duty, yet there is another duty superior to it, that which we owe to our Maker. And whenever even a parent would incite us to any thing plainly repugnant to his laws, as was the case in the pres-

ent inſtance, we muſt, though with all poſſible decency and reſpect, yet with firmneſs and with courage, reſiſt the impious command, and declare it to be our deſided reſolution "to obey God rather than man."

The next perſon that claims our notice in this intereſting narrative is Herod himſelf. We have already ſeen his inconſiſtent and undecided conduct reſpecting John.—He had in a moment of exaſperation thrown him into priſon; but from a reſpect to his character, and fear of the conſequences if he offered him any further violence, he ſuffered him to remain unmoleſted, and even frequently admitted him to his preſence, and held converſations with him. And it is not improbable that after ſome time his reſentment might have ſubſided, and he might have releaſed his priſoner. But when once a man has involved himſelf deeply in guilt, he has no ſafe ground to ſtand upon. Every thing is unſound and rotten under his feet.—He cannot ſay, "ſo far will I go in wickedneſs, and no farther." The crimes he has already committed may have an unſeen connection with others, of which he has not the ſlighteſt ſuſpicion; and he may be hurried, when he leaſt intends it, into enormities, of which he once thought himſelf utterly incapable. This was the caſe in the preſent inſtance. When Herod firſt engaged in his guilty intercourſe with Herodias, he probably meant to go no further. He meant to content himſelf with adultery and inceſt, and had no intentions of adding murder to the black catalogue of his crimes. He had no other view but the gratification of a preſent paſſion, and did not look forward to the many evils which ſcarce ever fail to ariſe from a criminal connection with a profligate and artful woman. This was the original and fruitful ſource of all his future crimes and future misfortunes. He flattered himſelf that, notwithſtanding his marriage with Herodias, he ſhould ſtill be maſter of his own reſolutions and his own actions. But Herodias ſoon taught him a different leſſon. She ſhewed that ſhe underſtood him much better than he did himſelf. She convinced him that his deſtiny was in her hands; that ſhe held the ſecret wire that governed all his motions; and that ſhe could, by one means or other, bend his mind to any purpoſe which ſhe was determined to accompliſh. It was *his* intention to ſave

John the Baptiſt. It was *her* intention to deſtroy him, and ſhe did it. He had indeed the courage to reſiſt her repeated ſolicitations that he would put John to death. And piqued himſelf probably on the firmneſs of his reſolution. But Herodias was not of a temper to be diſcouraged by a few denials or repulſes. She knew that there were other more effectual ways of carrying her point. If the king could not be compelled to ſurrender by aſſault, he might be taken by ſtratagem and ſurprize. And to this ſhe had recourſe. She ſaw that her daughter had attractions and accompliſhments which might be turned to good account, which might be made to opperate moſt powerfully on ſuch a mind as Herod's.

She therefore, as we have already ſeen, planned the project of her dancing before him on the feſtival of his birth-day, in the hope that in the unguarded moments of convivial mirth, he might be betrayed into ſome conceſſion, ſome act of indulgence towards this favorite daughter, from which he could not eaſily recede. The plan ſucceeded even probably beyond her expectations. The monarch was caught in the ſnare that was laid for him.—He made a raſh promiſe to Salome, and confirmed that promiſe by an oath, that he would give her whatſoever ſhe would aſk. And when, to his infinite aſtoniſhment and grief, ſhe demanded the life of a man whom he wiſhed to ſave, inſtead of retreating by the only way he had left, that of retracting a promiſe which it was madneſs to make, and the extremity of wickedneſs to perform, he was induced by a falſe point of honor (as worthleſs men frequently are) to commit an attocious murder rather than violate a raſh oath, an oath which could never make that right which was before intrinſically wrong, which could never bind him to any thing in itſelf unlawful, much leſs to the moſt unlawful of all things, the deſtruction of an innocent and virtuous man.

I have entered thus minutely into the detail of this remarkable tranſaction, becauſe, as I have before remarked, every line of it is replete with the moſt important inſtuction; as indeed is the caſe with every part of the ſacred hiſtory in the Goſpel, and the Acts, which teach full as much by the facts they relate as by the precepts they

inculcate. The moral leſſons to be drawn from the paſſage before us I have already pointed out in ſome degree as I went along; but there are one or two of a more general import, which I ſhall briefly add in concluſion, and which will deſerve your very ſerious attention.

The firſt is, that in the conduct of life there is nothing more to be dreaded and avoided, nothing more dangerous to our peace, to our comfort, to our character, to our welfare here and hereafter, than a criminal attachment to an abandoned and unprincipled woman, more particularly in the early period of life. It has been the ſource of more miſery, and beſides all the guilt which naturally belongs to it, has led to the commiſſion of more and greater crimes than perhaps any other ſingle cauſe that can be named. We have ſeen into what a gulph of ſin and ſuffering it plunged the wretched Herod. He began with adultery, and he ended with murder, and with the total ruin of himſelf, his kingdom, and all the vile partners of his guilt. The ſame has happened in a thouſand other inſtances; and there are, I am perſuaded, few perſons here preſent, of any age or experience in the world, who cannot recollect numbers, both of individuals and of families, whoſe peace, tranquillity, comfort, characters, and fortunes, have been completely deſtroyed by illicit and licentious connections of this ſort. Nor is this the worſt. The preſent effects of theſe vices, dreadful as they ſometimes are, cannot be compared with the miſery which they are preparing for us hereafter. The Scriptures every where rank theſe vices in the number of thoſe *preſumptuous* ſins, which, in a future life, will experience the ſevereſt marks of divine diſpleaſure. The world indeed, treats them with more indulgence. They are excuſed and palliated, and even defended on the ground of human frailty, of natural conſtitution, of ſtrong paſſions, and invincible temptations; and they are generally conſidered and repreſented in various popular performances (eſpecially in thoſe imported from foreign countries) as aſſociated with many amiable virtues, with goodneſs of heart, with high principles of honour, with benevolence, compaſſion, humanity, and generoſity. But whatever gentle names may be given to ſenſuality and licentiouſneſs, whatever

ſpecious apologies may be made for them, whatever wit or talents may be employed in rendering them popular and faſhionable, whatever numbers, whatever examples may ſanction or authorize them, it is impoſſible that any thing can do away their natural turpitude and deformity, or avert thoſe puniſhments which the Goſpel has denounced againſt them. They are repreſented there as things that ought not even to be *named* among Chriſtians, as defiling the man, as warring againſt the ſoul, as grieving the Spirit of God, as rendering men incapable of inheriting the kingdom of heaven, as expoſing them to the indignation of Him who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*. And as if men had indeavored in thoſe days as well as in our own, to ſoften and to extenuate and explain away the guilt of licentiouſneſs, the apoſtle adds, with great ſolemnity and great earneſtneſs, "Let no man deceive you with *vain* words: for becauſe of theſe things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of diſobedience†."

Let every man then that pretends to be a Chriſtian, and lives in the habitual practice of the vices here condemned, weigh well theſe tremendous words. If there be any truth in the Goſpel, they will not be *vain* words; nor will offences of this nature ever paſs unnoticed or unpuniſhed by the righteous Governor of the world.

Theſe remarks are not introduced here without reaſon. It is the peculiar prevalence of theſe very vices at this moment which demands ſuch animadverſions as theſe; a prevalence which I infer not merely from an imaginary eſtimate of the low ſtate of morals amongſt us, founded on rumour, on conjecture, or miſconſtruction, but from facts too well aſcertained, and which obtrude themſelves on the notice of every obſerving mind‡. I mean thoſe daring violations of the nuptial contract, and the frequent divorces reſulting from them, which ſeem daily gaining ground in this kingdom. This is a moſt melancholy and incontrovertible proof of increaſing depravity amongſt us, and I am ſorry to add, of depravity of the very deepeſt

* Ephes. v. 3. Matth. xv. 18. 1 Pet. ii. 11. 2 Cor. vi. 9, 10. Habak. i. 13.

† Ephes. v. 6. ‡ In the Spring of the year 1800.

dye; for inſtances have not long ſince occurred, in which the guilt of the parties too nearly reſembled that of Herod, combining the two atrocious crimes of adultery and inceſt? Surely ſuch enormities as theſe are enough to *make* us tremble, and loudly call for the interpoſition of the legiſlature, leſt they bring down upon us the juſt vengeance of an offended God. "Shall I not viſit for theſe things, ſaith the Lord! Shall not my ſoul be avenged on ſuch a nation as this*?"

Another reflection ariſing from this ſhort hiſtory of Herod and John the Baptiſt is this; that although, in the ordinary courſe of divine adminiſtration, the puniſhment of the wicked does not *always* overtake them *here*, but is reſerved for the laſt awful day of account; yet it ſometimes happens (as I obſerved in my laſt Lecture) that their crimes draw after them their juſt recompence, even in the preſent life. This was eminently the caſe of the flagitious Herod; for beſides thoſe terrors of conſcience, which, as we have ſeen, perpetually haunted him, which raiſed up before him terrific forms and agonizing apprehenſions, and repreſented John the Baptiſt as riſen from the dead to avenge his crimes; we are informed by the hiſtorian that his marriage with Herodias drew upon him the reſentment of Aretas, king of Arabia Petræa, the father of his firſt wife, who declared war againſt him, and, in an engagement with Herod's army, defeated it with great ſlaughter. This, ſays the hiſtorian, the Jews conſidered as a juſt judgment of God upon Herod for his murder of John the Baptiſt†. And not long after this, both he and Herodias were deprived of their kingdom by the Roman emperor, and ſent into perpetual baniſhment. And it is added by another hiſtorian‡, that their daughter Salome met with a violent and untimely death. Inſtances like this are intended to ſhew, that the Governor of the univerſe, though he has appointed a diſtant period for the *general* diſtribution of his rewards and puniſhments, yet, in extraordinary caſes, he will ſometime interpoſe to chaſtiſe the bold offender, to aſſert his ſuperintending provi-

* Jer. v. 9.
† Joſ. Ant. L. xviii. c. 5. s. 1 2.
‡ Nicephori. Hiſt. Eccles. L. 1 l. p. 89.

dence and ſupreme dominion over all his creatures, and to give them the moſt awful proofs that, from his all-ſearching eye, no wickedneſs can be concealed.

The remaining part of this chapter is occupied with the recital of two miracles, on which I have only to obſerve, that they have both of them a ſpiritual as well as a literal meaning, are both of a very extraordinary nature, as calculated to make, as they did, a moſt powerful impreſſion on the minds of the ſpectators; theſe were, the feeding above five thouſand perſons with five loaves and two fiſhes, and our Saviour's walking on the ſea. The firſt of theſe had a reference to that ſpiritual food, that celeſtial manna, that bread of life, which our Lord was then diſpenſing in ſuch abundance to thoſe that hungered and thirſted after righteouſneſs. The other was meant to encourage the great principle of faith; of *truſt and reliance upon God*, in oppoſition to that ſelf-confidence, that high opinion of our own ſtrength, which we are too apt to entertain, and to which St. Peter, above all the other apoſtles, was peculiarly liable. When therefore, in conſequence of his own requeſt, he was permitted to go to Jeſus on the water, and forgetting immediately who was his guide and ſupport, began to be afraid and to ſink, and called out to his divine maſter to ſave him, our Lord graciouſly ſtretched forth his hand and caught him, and ſaid unto him, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didſt thou doubt?" A reproof well calculated to convince him that it was not in proportion to his own natural ſtrength, but according to the degree of his faith, that he muſt riſe or ſink. And what he ſays to Peter, he ſays to all who waver in their belief: "O ye of little faith why do ye doubt?"

But there is another circumſtance belonging to theſe miracles, which is of great importance; they are very extraordinary and aſtoniſhing inſtances of our Lord's power over nature, and of ſuch a kind as to admit of no poſſibility of being counterfeited. And accordingly we find that although ſome cheats have pretended to cure diſeaſes miraculouſly, and ſome have even attempted to raiſe the dead, yet no impoſtor I believe has ever yet been ſo bold as to undertake to feed five thouſand people at once with five loaves and two fiſhes, or to walk upon the ſea. And

the reaſon is plain. It would not be very eaſy to perſuade five thouſand people that they had been plentifully fed, when in fact they had received no nouriſhment at all; and it would be rather too dangerous an experiment for any man, not really ſupported by the hand of God, to attempt walking on the ſea, when he cannot but know that the loſs of life muſt be the inevitable conſequence of it. Indeed this act has always been conſidered as utterly beyond all human power to atchieve; accordingly *two feet walking upon water* was an Egyptian hieroglyphic to denote *impoſſibility*. And Job repreſents the power of *treading on the waves of the ſea* as a diſtinguiſhing mark and attribute *of the Deity**. Yet this did Jeſus do; this impoſſibility did he accompliſh: a moſt inconteſtible proof that God was with him. And in fact, this miracle ſeems to have made a ſtronger impreſſion on the minds of his diſciples that any other recorded in the goſpels, even than that of raiſing the dead; for we are told in St. Mark†, that when our Lord went up into the ſhip from *walking on the ſea*, the diſciples were *ſore amazed* in themſelves *beyond meaſure*, and wondered. The words in the original are ſtill ſtronger; indeed ſo ſtrong, that it is impoſſible for the Engliſh language to expreſs all their force. In compariſon of this miracle, even that of the loaves and the fiſhes ſeems to have appeared nothing in the eyes of the diſciples; for St. Mark tells us, that they conſidered not the miracle of the loaves, for their heart was hardened; but at the act of walking on the ſea they were *amazed beyond meaſure*; they were overwhelmed and overcome with this aſtoniſhing diſplay of divine power; they fell inſtantly at the feet of Jeſus, and worſhipped him; and exclaimed, as every one who conſiders this ſtupendous miracle *muſt* do, "Of a truth *thou art the* SON OF GOD!"

* Job ix. 8. † Chap. vi.

LECTURE XV.

MATTHEW xvii.

I SHALL now requeſt your attention to a very remarkable part of our Saviour's hiſtory, that which is called by the evangeliſt his TRANSFIGURATION, and which is related in the ſeventeenth chapter of St. Matthew. It ſo happens, that many years ago I turned my thoughts very much to this particular ſubject in the ſacred writings, and ventured (though without my name) to lay my ſentiments concerning it before the public. I could have wiſhed therefore to have excuſed myſelf from repeating here any part of what I have ſaid elſewhere, and to have paſſed over this incident unnoticed. But when I conſidered that this tranſaction is of a very peculiar and extraordinary nature; that there are circumſtances attending it which cannot fail to excite the curioſity of an inquiſitive mind; that there are difficulties in it which ſtand in need of a ſolution, and concluſions to be drawn from it of conſiderable utility and importance; when I conſidered further, that much the greateſt part of this audience had probably never ſeen or even heard of what I had formerly written on this ſubject; I determined not to omit ſo material a part of the taſk I am engaged in, but to give you what I conceive to be a true explanation of this intereſting event. And I now feel the leſs difficulty in doing this, becauſe, upon a careful review of that interpretation, after an interval of twelve years, I am ſtill convinced of its truth, and have had the additional ſatisfaction of finding it confirmed by the authority of ſome learned and judicious commentators, whoſe opinions on one or two leading principles coincide with my own; but whoſe obſervations I had not ſeen (having conſulted but very few expoſitors on the ſubject) when my eſſay went to the preſs.

The relation of this ſingular tranſaction is given us by three out of four evangeliſts, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and alluded to in the writings of the fourth. They all agree in the main points. There is no material variation, and not the leaſt contradiction between them. But, as is very natural, where different perſons relate the ſame fact (and as indeed muſt generally happen where the ſtory is not concerted among them) a few particulars are taken notice of by ſome which are paſſed over in ſilence by others. St. Matthew's account of it is as follows:

"And after ſix days Jeſus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them; and his face did ſhine as the ſun, and his raiment was white as the light. And behold there appeared unto them Moſes and Elias talking with him. Then anſwered Peter, and ſaid unto Jeſus, Lord, it is good for us to be here; if thou wilt, let us make three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moſes, and one for Elias. While he yet ſpake, *behold* a bright cloud overſhadowed them; and behold a voice out of the cloud, which ſaid, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleaſed; hear ye him. And when the diſciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were ſore afraid. And Jeſus came and touched them, and ſaid, Ariſe, and be not afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they ſaw no man ſave Jeſus only. And as they came down from the mount, Jeſus charged them, ſaying, tell the viſion to no man, until the Son of man be riſen again from the dead.

"And his diſciples aſked him, ſaying, Why then ſay the ſcribes, that Elias muſt firſt come? And Jeſus anſwered and ſaid unto them, Elias ſhall truly firſt come, and reſtore all things. But I ſay unto you, that Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatſoever they liſted: likewiſe alſo ſhall the Son of man ſuffer of them. Then the diſciples underſtood that he ſpake unto them of John the Baptiſt."

Such is the hiſtory which the evangeliſt gives us of the tranſfiguration; and on the very firſt view of it, every one

muſt ſee that a tranſaction of ſo uncommon and ſplendid a nature could not be intended merely to ſurprize and amuſe the diſciples. There muſt have been ſome great object in view; ſome end to be obtained, worthy of the magnificent apparatus made uſe of to accompliſh it.

Now there were, I conceive (beſides ſome collateral and ſubordinate deſigns) two principal and important purpoſes, which were meant to be anſwered by this illuſtrious ſcene.

The firſt was to ſet before the eyes of the diſciples a *viſible and figurative repreſentation of Chriſt's coming in glory to judge the world, and to reward, with everlaſting felicity, all his faithful ſervants.*

In order to prove this, and at the ſame time to bring to the reader's view thoſe circumſtances which preceded, and in ſome degree gave occaſion to this celeſtial viſion, it will be neceſſary to look back to the chapter immediately before that in which the transfiguration is related.

In the 21ſt verſe of the ſixteenth chapter we find, that Jeſus then, for the firſt time, thought fit to give ſome intimations to his diſciples of the ſtrange and extraordinary ſcenes he was ſoon to paſs through; his ſufferings, his death, and his reſurrection; things of which, before this declaration, they ſeem not to have had the ſmalleſt conception or ſuſpicion.

"From that time forth began Jeſus to ſhew to his diſciples how that he muſt go to Jeruſalem, and ſuffer many things of the elders and chief prieſts and ſcribes, and be killed, and raiſed again the third day*."

This information, ſo perfectly new and unexpected to the diſciples, and ſo deſtructive of all the fond hopes they had hitherto indulged, overwhelmed them with aſtoniſhment and grief. And St. Peter, whoſe natural warmth and eagerneſs of temper generally led him both to feel ſuch mortifications more ſenſibly, and to expreſs his feelings more promptly and more forcibly, than any of

* Matth. xvi. 21.

the reſt, was ſo ſhocked at what he had juſt heard, that "he took Jeſus, and began to rebuke him, ſaying, Be it far from thee, Lord; this ſhall not be unto thee." Our Saviour, who ſaw every thing that paſſed in his mind, and perceived, probably, that this expoſtulation took its riſe more from diſappointed intereſt and ambition than from a generous concern for his maſter's credit and honour, gave him an immediate and ſevere reproof. "Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou art an offence to me; for thou ſavoureſt not the things that be of God, but thoſe that be of men."

He then proceeded to ſhew, not only that he himſelf muſt ſuffer perſecution, but that all thoſe who would at that time come after him, and ſhare with him the arduous and dangerous taſk of ſowing the firſt ſeeds of the Goſpel, "muſt deny themſelves, and take up their croſs, and follow him." But then, to ſupport them under thoſe ſevere injunctions, he cheers them immediately with a brighter ſcene of things, and with a proſpect of *his future* glory, and *their* future recompence. "The Son of man ſhall come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then ſhall he reward every man according to his works." And he adds, "Verily I ſay unto you, there be ſome ſtanding here which ſhall not taſte of death till they ſee the Son of man coming in his kingdom." The meaning of theſe laſt words I ſhall enquire into hereafter. But the evident tendency of the whole paſſage is to prepare the minds of his diſciples for the cruel treatment which both he and they were to undergo, and at the ſame time to raiſe their drooping ſpirits, by ſetting before their eyes his own exaltation, and their glorious rewards in another life.

This diſcourſe, however, he probably found had not ſufficiently ſubdued their prejudices, and reconciled them to his ſtate of humiliation; and therefore he determined to try a method of impreſſing them with juſter ſentiments, which he frequently had recourſe to on ſimilar occaſions; and that was, repreſenting to them, by a *ſignificant action*, what he had already explained by words.

Accordingly, within a few days after the foregoing converſation, he taketh with him Peter, James, and John,

and bringeth them up into a high mountain (probably Mount Tabor) apart. Very fanciful reaſons have been aſſigned by ſome of the commentators for his taking with him only three of his diſciples. But all that it ſeems neceſſary to ſay on this head is, that as the law required no more than two or three witneſſes to conſtitute a regular and judicial proof, our Saviour frequently choſe to have only this number of witneſſes preſent at ſome of the moſt important and intereſting ſcenes of his life. The three diſciples, whom he now ſelected, were thoſe that generally attended him on ſuch occaſions, and who ſeem to have been diſtinguiſhed as his moſt intimate and confidential friends. St. John, we know, was ſo in an eminent degree. St. James, his brother, would, from that near connection, probably be brought more frequently under his maſter's notice; and as St. Peter was the very perſon who had expreſſed himſelf with ſo much indignation on the ſubject of our Saviour's ſufferings, it was highly proper and neceſſary that he ſhould be admitted to a ſpectacle, which was purpoſely calculated to calm thoſe emotions, and remove that diſguſt which the firſt mention of them had produced in his mind.

With theſe companions, then, Jeſus aſcended the mountain, and was transfigured before them; "and behold there appeared Moſes and Elias talking with him." They were not only *ſeen* by the diſciples, but they were *heard* alſo converſing with Jeſus. This is a circumſtance of great importance, eſpecially when we are told what the ſubject of their converſation was. St. Luke gives us this uſeful piece of information; he ſays, that "they ſpake of our Lord's deceaſe, which he ſhould accompliſh at Jeruſalem." The very *mention* of Chriſt's ſufferings and death by ſuch men as Moſes and Elias, without any marks of ſurprize or diſſatisfaction, was of itſelf ſufficient to occaſion a great change in the ſentiments of the diſciples reſpecting thoſe ſufferings, and to ſoften thoſe prejudices of their's againſt them, the removal of which ſeems to have been one of the more immediate objects of the transfiguration. But if we ſuppoſe further (what is far from being improbable) that in the courſe of the converſation ſeveral intereſting particulars reſpecting our Saviour's crucifixion were brought un-

der diſcuſſion; if they entered at any length into that important ſubject, *the great work of our redemption*; if they touched upon the nature, the cauſes, and the conſequences of it; the pardon of ſin, the reſtitution to God's favour, the triumph over death, and the gift of *eternal* life; if they ſhewed that the ſufferings of Chriſt were prefigured in the law, and foretold by the prophets; it is eaſy to ſee, that topics ſuch as theſe muſt tend ſtill further to open the eyes, and remove the prepoſſeſſions of his diſciples; and the more ſo, becauſe they would ſeem to ariſe incidentally in a diſcourſe between other perſons caſually overheard; which having no appearance of deſign or profeſſed oppoſition in it, would be apt to make a deeper impreſſion on their minds than a direct and open attack upon their prejudices.

But the circumſtance which would, probably, be moſt effectual in correcting the erroneous ideas of his diſciples on this head, was the act of the transfiguration itſelf, the aſtoniſhing change it produced in the whole of our *Lord's* external appearance.

From the expreſſions made uſe of by the ſeveral evangeliſts, this change appears to have been a very illuſtrious one. They inform us, that "as our Saviour prayed, the faſhion of his countenance was changed; his face did ſhine as the ſun, and his raiment became exceeding white and gliſtering; as white as ſnow, as white as the light, ſo as no fuller on earth could whiten it." Now Chriſt having aſſumed this ſplendid and glorious appearance, at the very time when Moſes and Elias were converſing with him on his ſufferings, it was a *viſible* and ſtriking proof to his diſciples, that thoſe ſufferings were not, as they imagined, any real diſcredit and diſgrace to him, but were perfectly conſiſtent with the dignity of his character, and the higheſt ſtate of glory to which he could be exalted.

But further ſtill; Jeſus had (in the converſation mentioned in the preceding chapter) told his diſciples, that the Son of man ſhould come *in the glory of his Father*, with his holy angels, to judge the world. The ſcene on the mount therefore, *which ſo ſoon followed that conver-*

ſation, was probably meant to convey to them ſome idea and ſome evidence *of his coming in glory* at the great day of judgment, of which his transfiguration was, perhaps, as juſt a picture and exemplification as human ſight could bear.

It is, indeed, deſcribed in nearly the ſame terms that St. John in the Revelations applies to the Son of man in his *ſtate of glory* in heaven. "He was clothed, ſays he, with a garment down to the foot. His head and his hair were white like wool, white as ſnow; and his countenance was as the ſun ſhineth in his ſtrength." It is remarkable, that St. Luke calls his appearance, after being transfigured, *his glory*. St. John, who was likewiſe preſent at this appearance, gives it the ſame name. "We beheld his *glory*, as of the only begotten of his Father." And St. Peter, who was another witneſs to this tranſaction on the mount, refers to it by a ſimilar expreſſion. "For he received, ſays that Apoſtle, from God the Father, *honor and glory*, when there came ſuch a voice to him from the excellent glory, this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleaſed*." There can hardly, therefore remain any doubt, but that *the glory which Chriſt received from the Father* on the mountain, was meant to be a repreſentation of his coming *in the glory of his Father*, with his holy angels, at the end of the world; which is one of the topics touched upon in the preceding chapter.

Another thing there mentioned was *our Saviour's reſurrection*. Of this, indeed, there is no direct ſymbol in the transfiguration: but it is evidently implied in that tranſaction; becauſe Jeſus is there repreſented in his glorified, celeſtial ſtate, which being in the natural order of time ſubſequent to his reſurrection, that event muſt naturally be ſuppoſed to have previouſly taken place.

But though this great event is only indirectly alluded to here, yet thoſe moſt important doctrines, which are founded upon it, *a general reſurrection* and *a day of retribution*, are expreſsly repreſented in the transfiguration.

* 2 Pet, i. 17.

In the ſixteenth chapter of St. Matthew, Chriſt tells his diſciples, that when "he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels, he will reward every man according to his works*:" From whence it neceſſarily follows that every man who is dead ſhall riſe from the grave. And in confirmation of both theſe truths, there are *two* juſt and righteous men, Moſes and Elias, who had many years before departed out of the world, brought back to it again, and repreſented (as we ſhall ſee hereafter) in a ſtate of glory. That they actually appeared in their own proper perſons there is not the leaſt reaſon to doubt. Grotius even goes ſo far as to affirm, that their bodies were *reſerved* for this very purpoſe. But there is no neceſſity and no ground for this imagination. For though, indeed, the ſepulchre of Moſes was not known, yet his body was actually buried in a valley in the land of Moab, and therefore muſt have ſeen corruption; and as the whole tranſaction was miraculous, it was juſt as eaſy to Omnipotence to reſtore life and form to a body mouldered into duſt, as to re-animate a body that was preſerved *uncorrupted* and entire; and, indeed, was a much exacter emblem of our own reſurrection. We may, however, readily admit what ſome learned men have juſtly obſerved, that Elias, having been carried up into heaven without undergoing death, he was here a proper repreſentative of thoſe who ſhall be found *alive* at the day of judgment, as Moſes is of thoſe who had died, and are raiſed to life again. And his appearance a ſecond time on earth, after he had been ſo many ages dead and buried, muſt have been a convincing proof to the diſciples (had they duly attended to it) of the poſſibility of a reſurrection.

And what is no leſs important, the *manner* in which both Moſes and Elias appeared on this occaſion, afforded the diſciples an occular demonſtration of *a day of retribution*, agreeably to what their divine Maſter had a few days before told them, *that he would reward every man according to his works.*

For we are informed, that both Moſes and Elias appeared alſo in *glory*; a glory ſomewhat ſimilar, we may

* Ver. 27.

ſuppoſe, though far inferior, to that with which Chriſt was inveſted. Like him they were probably clothed in raiments of unuſual whiteneſs and ſplendor; and the faſhion of their countenances might alſo be changed to ſomething more bright and illuſtrious. Now this would be a juſt repreſentation of the *glorified ſtate* of ſaints in heaven, of thoſe who had been rewarded according to their works. For we find thoſe holy men, who have paſſed victoriouſly through their Chriſtian warfare, deſcribed by St. John as clothed *in white raiments** ; and by St. Matthew, as *ſhining forth* like *the ſun* in the kingdom of their Father†.

The *glory of Chriſt* therefore on the mountain, was a ſymbol of his exaltation to be the judge of the earth; and the *glory of Moſes and Elias* was an emblem of the rewards given to the righteous in heaven.

When all theſe circumſtances are put together, they throw conſiderable light over the concluding part of Chriſt's converſation, which has not yet been noticed. *Verily I ſay unto you, there be ſome ſtanding here which ſhall not taſte of death till they ſee the Son of man coming in his kingdom*‡. This has commonly been ſuppoſed to refer to the ſignal manifeſtation of Chriſt's power in the deſtruction of Jeruſalem. But we know of no one of Chriſt's diſciples that ſurvived this event except St. John; and our Saviour here ſpeaks of more than one. But beſides this, in the 27th verſe of this chapter, we are told that *the Son of man ſhall come in the glory of his Father, to reward every man according to his works*. This, undoubtedly, relates to Chriſt's final advent to judge the world. When, therefore, it immediately follows in the very next verſe, Verily, I ſay unto you, that there be ſome ſtanding here, which ſhall not taſte of death *till they ſee the Son of man coming in his kingdom*; is it not moſt natural, is it not almoſt neceſſary to underſtand theſe ſimilar expreſſions as relating to the ſame great event?

* Rev. iii. 5. † Matth. xiii. 43.

‡ Matthew, xvi. 28.—St. Mark ſays, "Till they have ſeen the kingdom of God come with power."—St. Luke, "till they ſee the kingdom of God."

But did Chriſt then mean to ſay here that ſome of his diſciples ſhould live till the day of judgment? Moſt aſſuredly not. He meant only to intimate that a few of them ſhould before their death, be favored with a *repreſentation* of the glorious appearance of Chriſt and his ſaints on that awful day. And this illuſtrious ſcene was actually diſplayed to three of them, about ſix days after, in the tranſfiguration on the mountain. Indeed St. Peter himſelf, who was preſent at the transfiguration, plainly alludes to it, in a manner which powerfully confirms this opinion. "We have not," ſays he, "followed cunningly deviſed fables, when we made known unto you the *power* and *coming* of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt." That is, our Lord's coming in his *kingdom* with *power* and *glory* and *majeſty*, to judge the world. And how does St. Peter here prove that he will ſo come? Why, by declaring that he and the two other diſciples, James and John, were *eye-witneſſes of his majeſty*; that is, they actually ſaw him on the mount, inveſted with *majeſty* and *glory* ſimilar to that which he would aſſume in his kingdom at the laſt day. "For," continues the apoſtle, "he received from God the Father, *honar* and *glory*, when there came ſuch a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleaſed; and this voice, which came from heaven, we heard, *when we were with him in the holy mount*[*]."

This is St. Peter's own comment on the transfiguration, in which he expreſsly compares Chriſt's *glory* and *majeſty* on the mount, to that which he will diſplay in his final advent; and conſiders the former as an emblem, an earneſt, and a proof of the latter.

It is then evident, I think, from the foregoing obſervations, that the ſcene upon the mountain was a *ſymbolical repreſentation of Chriſt's coming in glory to judge the world, and of the rewards which ſhall then be given to the righteous*, topics which had been touched upon in Chriſt's diſcourſe with his diſciples ſix days before; and that one great object of this expreſſive action, as well as of that converſation, was to reconcile the minds of his diſciples to the ſufferings which both he and they were to undergo, by ſhew-

[*] 2 Pet. i. 16, 17. 18.

ing that they were preparatory and ſubſervient to *his* future glory, and *their* future rewards.

The other great purpoſe of the action on the mount was, I apprehend, to ſignify, in a figurative manner, *the ceſſation of the Jewiſh, and the commencement of the Chriſtian diſpenſation.*

It appears to have been one prevailing prejudice among the diſciples, that the whole Moſaical law, the ceremonial as well as the moral, was to continue in full force under the Goſpel; and that the authority of Moſes and the prophets was not, in any reſpect, to give way on the eſtabliſhment of Chriſtianity, but to be placed on an equal footing with that of Chriſt.

To correct this erroneous opinion, no leſs than to vanquiſh their prepoſſeſſion againſt the ſufferings of Chriſt, (as already explained) was the ſcene of the transfiguration preſented to the three choſen diſciples, Peter, James, and John.

There are ſeveral remarkable circumſtances attending that event, which lead us to this concluſion.

Moſes and Elias muſt certainly be allowed to be very natural and proper repreſentatives of the *law* and the *prophets*.

When the three diſciples ſaw theſe illuſtrious perſons converſing familiarly with Jeſus, it probably confirmed them in their opinion, that they were to be conſidered as of *equal* dignity and authority with him; and under this impreſſion, Peter immediately addreſſed himſelf to Jeſus, and ſaid, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; and if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moſes, and one for Elias." The full meaning of which exclamation was, "What greater happineſs, Lord, can we experience than to continue here in the preſence of three ſuch great and excellent perſons! Here then let us for ever remain! Here let us erect three tents, for thee, for Moſes, and Elias, that you may all make this the con-

ſtant place of your abode, and that we may always continue under the protection and government, and UNDER EMPIRE of our three illuſtrious lords and maſters, whoſe ſovereign laws and commands we are *equally* bound to obey!"

The anſwer to this extraordinary propoſal was inſtantly given both by action and by words. "While he yet ſpake, behold a bright cloud overſhadowed them; and behold a voice out of the cloud, which ſaid, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleaſed: HEAR YE HIM."

The CLOUD is the well-known token of the divine preſence under the law: many inſtances of it occur in the Old Teſtament, but more particularly at the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. On the mountain where our Saviour was transfigured, a new law was declared to have taken place; and therefore God again appears in a *cloud*. But there is one remarkable difference between theſe two manifeſtations of the divine preſence. On Mount Sinai the cloud was *dark* and *thick*: "and there were thunders and lightnings, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud, and all the people that were in the camp *trembled**." At the transfiguration, on the contrary, the cloud was *bright*, the whole ſcene was luminous and tranſporting, and nothing was heard but the mild paternal voice of the Almighty expreſſing his delight in his beloved Son. Theſe *ſtriking* differences in the two appearances evidently point out the different tempers of the two diſpenſations, of which the former, from its ſeverity, was more calculated to excite terror; the latter, from its gentleneſs, to inſpire love.

This circumſtance alone, therefore, indicated a happy change in the divine œconomy; but the gracious words which iſſued from the cloud, moſt clearly explained the meaning of what was paſſing before the eyes of the diſciples, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleaſed: HEAR YE HIM." "This is my *Son*, not as Moſes and all the prophets were, my *ſervants*. HIM, and him

* Exod. xix. 16.

only, you are now to hear. He is from henceforth to be your lord, your legiſlator, and your king. The evangelical law being eſtabliſhed, the ceremonial law muſt ceaſe; and Moſes and the PROPHETS muſt give way to CHRIST." With this declaration the concluſion of the whole ſcene on the mountain perfectly harmonizes. Moſes and Elias inſtantly diſappear, and "when the diſciples lift up their eyes, they ſee no man ſave Jeſus only." The former objects of their veneration are no more. Chriſt remains *alone* their unrivalled and undiſputed ſovereign.

In ſupport of this interpretation it may be further obſerved, that there was reaſon to expect, about that time, ſome ſuch declaration as this reſpecting the ceſſation of the Moſaical law. For St. Luke informs us, that the "law and the prophets were until John;" that is, they were to continue in force till John the Baptiſt had (as our Lord expreſſes it) *reſtored all things*, had preached thoſe great doctrines of repentance and redemption by the blood of Chriſt, by which men were *reſtored* to a right ſtate of mind, and the favour of God; till he had thus prepared the way for the Meſſiah, and publicly announced the kingdom of God; and then they were to be ſuperſeded by the Chriſtian diſpenſation. Accordingly, not long after the death of John, the ſcene of the transfiguration took place; and this great revolution, this ſubſtitution of a new ſyſtem for the old one, was made known in that remarkable manner to the three diſciples. This ſecondary meaning here aſſigned to the viſion on the mount, will aſſiſt us in explaining an injunction of our Lord to his diſciples, for which, though other reaſons have been aſſigned, yet they are not, I think, altogether ſatisfactory.

In the 9th verſe we are told, that as they came down from the mount, Jeſus charged the diſciples, ſaying, "Tell the viſion to no man, till the Son of man be riſen again from the dead."

If the only intent of the transfiguration had been to repreſent, by an expreſſive action, our Lord's reſurrection and exaltation, and a future day of retribution, it is not eaſy to aſſign a ſufficient reaſon why this injunction of ſo-

crecy, till after his reſurrection, ſhould have been given; becauſe he had already foretold his reſurrection to his diſciples*, and he alſo apprized them before his death of his coming in glory to judge the world†. It does not therefore appear, how the publication of the viſion on the mount could have been attended with any other conſequence, than that of *confirming* what Jeſus had already made known.

But if we ſuppoſe that *one* purpoſe of the tranſfiguration was to typify the abolition of the ceremonial law, and the eſtabliſhment of the evangelical, a plain reaſon preſents itſelf for this command of keeping it for ſome time private; for it was one of thoſe truths which the firſt converts were not able to bear. Great numbers of them, though they firmly believed in Chriſt, yet no leſs firmly belived that the Moſaical diſpenſation was ſtill in full force. This prejudice, it is well known, continued ſeveral years after our Lord's reſurrection. Mention is made "of ſeveral thouſand Jews who believed, and yet were all zealous of the law." And it was the ſuſpicion that St. Paul had forſaken, and taught others to forſake Moſes, which brought his life into the moſt imminent danger, and actually occaſioned his impriſonment. No wonder then that a tranſaction which was deſigned to prefigure this very doctrine that St. Paul was charged with, and that was ſo offenſive to the Jewiſh converts in general, ſhould be thought unfit by our Lord to be publicly divulged till ſome time, perhaps a conſiderable time, after his reſurrection.

From the whole, then, of the preceding obſervations, it appears, that the tranſfiguration of Chriſt was one of thoſe emblematical actions, or figurative repreſentations, of which ſo many inſtances have been pointed out, and at the ſame time very diſtinctly explained, and elegantly illuſtrated, by ſome of our beſt divines.

The things repreſented by this ſignificant tranſaction were:

* Chap. xvi. 21. † Chap. xxv.

First, the future glory of Christ, a general resurrection, and a future retribution.

Secondly, the abrogation of the Mosaical, and the establishment of the evangelical dispensation.

And the *immediate* purpose of these representations was, as I before observed, to correct two inveterate prejudices which prevailed among the disciples, and the Jewish converts in general.

Of these one was the extreme offence they took at any mention of the death and sufferings of Christ, which they conceived to be utterly inconsistent with his dignity.

The other was their persuation that the ceremonial law was not done away by the Gospel, but that they were to exist together in full force, and to have an equal obedience paid to them by all the disciples of Christ.

But though the removal of these prejudices was, as I conceive, the primary and immediate design of the transfiguration, yet there are also purposes of great utility to all Christians in general in every age, which it might be, and probably was intended to answer.

In the first place it affords one more additional proof of the divine mission of Christ, and the divine authority of his religion.

It is one of the few occasions on which God himself was pleased, as it were, *personally to interpose*, and to make an open declaration from heaven in favour of his Son.—"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him." Two other instances only of this kind occur in the Gospels; one at our Saviour's baptism, the other on his praying to his Father to save him from the sufferings that awaited him.

Now these signs from heaven may be considered *as a distinct species of evidence*, different both from miracles and prophecies, frequently and earnestly wished for by the

Jews, but not granted to them, nor vouchſafed to any one, but very ſparingly, and on great and ſolemn occaſions.

But beſides this awful teſtimony to the divine *origin* of our religion in general, a particular atteſtation was (as we have ſeen) given on the mount to two of its principal doctrines, A GENERAL RESURRECTION, and A DAY OF RETRIBUTION. The viſible and illuſtrious repreſentation of theſe in the glorified appearance of Chriſt, and *Moſes* and *Elias*, has been already explained, and is appealed to by St. Peter, who ſaw it, as one convincing proof, among others, that "he had not followed cunningly deviſed fables," when he made known "the power and coming of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt." And, indeed, ſince theſe two doctrines, a RESURRECTION, and a DAY of JUDGMENT, are two of the moſt eſſential and fundamental articles of our faith; and ſince it was one of the chief purpoſes of the Chriſtian revelation, "to bring life and immortality to light," no wonder that God ſhould graciouſly condeſcend to confirm theſe great truths to us in ſo many various ways; by words and by actions, by prophecies, by miracles, and by celeſtial viſions.

LECTURE XVI.

MATTH. xviii.

THE ſubject of this Lecture is a part of the eighteenth chapter of St. Matthew. It is evident that the diſciples of our Lord were, for a conſiderable time, poſſeſſed with the imagination which prevailed univerſally among the Jews reſpecting their Meſſiah, that their Maſter's kingdom was to be a temporal one; that he was at ſome time or other to become a prince of great power and ſplendor, and that they of courſe ſhould enjoy the largeſt ſhare of his favor, and be placed in ſituations of great diſtinction and great emolument. And this deluſion had taken ſuch ſtrong hold upon their minds, that although our Lord took frequent opportunities of combating their error, and made uſe of every means in his power to undeceive them, yet they ſtill perſiſted in maintaining their favorite opinion; and in the beginning of this chapter they came to Jeſus, ſaying, who is the greateſt in the kingdom of heaven? It appears, from the parallel paſſage in St. Mark, that they had been diſputing by the way who ſhould be the greateſt. Our Lord knowing this, and finding that all he had ſaid on this ſubject had produced no effect upon them, determined to try whether a different mode of conveying his ſentiments to them might not ſtrike their minds more forcibly. He therefore had recourſe (as in the caſe of the transfiguration) to what may be called a viſible kind of language. He took a little child, and placing him before them, bid them contemplate the innocence and ſimplicity, the meekneſs and humility which marked its countenance; and then aſſured them, that unleſs they were converted, and became as little children; that is, unleſs a total change took place in the temper and diſpoſition of their minds, unleſs they became as unambitious and unaſpiring, as meek, as humble and contented, as little concerned about worldly honors and diſtinctions, as the child

before them, they could not enter into the kingdom of heaven; they could never be considered as true objects of Christ's kingdom here, or be capable of inheriting the rewards of heaven hereafter. In the eye of God, true humility is a most sublime virtue; and whoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Our Lord then goes on to say, "Whosoever receiveth one such little child in my name, receiveth me." That is, it is men of humble minds and meek dispositions, whom I most highly prize, and whom I most strongly recommend to the notice, the kindness, the protection of all those who are friends to me and my religion; and so dear are men of this description to me, that I make their interests my own, and I shall consider every man who receives, and assists, and encourages them on my account, and for my sake, as receiving me. But if, instead of receiving and protecting these my humble disciples, any one should dare to injure them, he must expect the severest marks of my displeasure. "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe unto the world, because of offences; for it must needs be that offences come, but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh."

In order to comprehend the full meaning of this denunciation, it will be necessary to explain the peculiar meaning of the word *offend*. Now this expression in the present passage, as well as in many other parts of the New Testament, signifies to cause any one *to fall from his faith*, to renounce his belief in Christ by any means whatever; and against every one that makes use either of violence or artifice to terrify or seduce the sincere and humble, and unsuspicious believer in Christ from his faith and obedience to his divine Master, the severest woes, and the heaviest punishments are here denounced.

This text of scripture therefore I would most earnestly recommend to the serious consideration of those who either are or have been guilty of this most dangerous crime; and I would also no less earnestly caution all those who

have not yet been guilty of it, to avoid, with the utmoſt care, every degree of it, and every approach to it. It is a crime often touched upon in holy writ, but leſs noticed, or at leaſt leſs enlarged upon by divines and moraliſts than perhaps any other ſin of the ſame magnitude.—For this reaſon, I ſhall enter more fully into the conſideration of it than has hitherto, I believe, been uſually done, and ſhall advert briefly to the ſeveral modes of *making our brother to offend*, that is, to renounce his faith in Chriſt, which are moſt common and moſt ſucceſsful; and theſe are perſecution, ſophiſtry, ridicule, immoral examples, and immoral publications.

With reſpect to the firſt of theſe, perſecution; it was, during the firſt ages of the goſpel, and for many years after the reformation, the great *rock of offence*, the chief inſtrument made uſe of (and a dreadful one it was) to deter men from embracing the faith of Chriſt, or to compel them to renounce it. But ſince that time we have heard little of its terrors, till they were ſome years ago revived, to a certain degree, in a neighboring nation, where the various cruelties inflicted on their clergy are too well known, and cannot ſurely be aſcribed altogether and excluſively to political cauſes.

In our own country, it muſt be acknowledged, we cannot juſtly be charged with this ſpecies of guilt. Intolerance and perſecution are certainly not in the number of our national ſins. But in the next mode of making our brother to offend; that is, by grave argument and reaſon, by open and ſyſtematic attacks on the truth and divine authority of the Chriſtian revelation, in this we have, I fear, a large load of reſponſibility upon our heads.

It has even been affirmed by ſome, that we are entitled to the deſtinction of having led the way to this kind of impiety and profaneneſs. We have this honor given to us (for an honor *they* eſteem it) by foreign writers, and what is worſt of all, we are applauded for it by ſuch men as D'Alembert and Voltaire.

To be ſtigmatized with *their* praiſe, and for ſuch a reaſon, is a diſgrace indeed; and it would be a ſtill greater,

if we could not juſtly diſclaim and throw back from ourſelves the humiliating and ignominious applauſe which they would inflict upon us. But this I apprehend we may effectually do. There appears to me ſufficient ground for aſſerting, that the earlieſt infidels of *modern* times were to be found, not in this iſland, but on the continent. If we may credit the account given of Peter Aretin (who lived and wrote in the fourteenth century) by Moreri, and particularly the epitaph upon him, which he recites, there is reaſon to believe that he was an infidel of the worſt ſpecies; and Viret a divine of great eminence among the firſt reformers, who wrote about the year 1563, ſpeaks of a number of perſons, both in France and Italy, who had aſſumed the name of Deiſts, and ſeem to have formed themſelves into a ſect. But it was not until the beginning of the following century that any men of that deſcription, or any publications hoſtile to revelation, appeared in this kingdom. From that time indeed down to the preſent, there has been a regular ſucceſſion of anti-chriſtian writers of various deſcriptions and various talents, whoſe *uniform* object has been to ſubvert the foundations of revealed religion, and to make their countrymen *offend*, and renounce their faith. The laſt of theſe was a man, who, from the loweſt origin, raiſed himſelf to ſome diſtinction in the political and literary world, by his bold and impious libels againſt government, againſt religion, and the holy Scriptures themſelves. In theſe writings were concentrated all the malignity, all the ſhrewdneſs, all the ſophiſtry of his numerous predeceſſors; and from their brevity, their plainneſs, their familiarity, their vulgar ribaldry, their bold aſſertions, and artful miſrepreſentations, they were better calculated to impoſe on the ignorant and uninformed, and more dangerous to the principles of the great maſs of mankind, than any publications that this country ever before produced. And certain it is, that having been diſtributed with infinite induſtry through every diſtrict of the kingdom, they did for a time diffuſe their poiſon far and wide, and made a ſtrong and fatal impreſſion on the multitude. But, thanks be to God! they at length providentially met with talents infinitely ſuperior to thoſe of their illiterate author, which, with the bleſſing of Heaven upon them, gave a ſudden and effectual check to

the progress of this mischief, and afforded a striking proof of the truth of that prophecy respecting the stability of our religion, "that the gates of hell shall never prevail against it."

The next great engine of offence, by which multitudes have been led to renounce their faith, is *ridicule*. An attempt was made early in the last century to erect this into a *test of truth*, and it has accordingly been applied by many writers since that time to throw discredit on the Christian revelation. But by no one has this weapon been employed with more force and with more success than by the great patriarch of infidelity, Voltaire. It is the principal instrument he makes use of to vilify the Gospel; and among the instructions he gives to his coadjutors and fellow-laborers in this righteous work, *one* is, to load the Christian religion and the author of it with never-ceasing ridicule, to burlesque it in every way that imagination can suggest, and to deluge the world with an infinity of little tracts, placing revelation in the most ludicrous point of view, and rendering it an object of mirth and of contempt to the lowest of mankind. This method he strictly pursued himself; to this he bent all the powers of his mind, all the vivacity of his wit, all the fire of his imagination; and whoever examines his writings against Christianity with care, will find that much the largest part of them are of this description. And in this he showed a thorough knowledge of the world. He knew that mankind in general prefer wit to logic, and love to be entertained rather than convinced; that it is much easier to point an epigram than to produce an argument; that few can reason justly, but that all the world can be made to laugh; and that whatever can be rendered an object of derision, is almost sure to be rejected without examination. Of all these artifices he has availed himself with infinite address, and we know also with fatal success. His writings have unquestionably produced more infidels among the higher classes, and spread more general corruption over the world, than all the voluminous productions of all the other philosophists of Europe put together.

There is still another way of making one brother an

offend, or in other words of ſhaking his faith in the Goſpel, and that is by exhibiting to mankind in our life and converſation a profligate example.

This in the firſt place gives the world an unfavorable idea of the religion we profeſs. It tempts men to think either that we ourſelves do not believe it, or that we ſuppoſe it conſiſtent with the vices to which we are abandoned; and either of theſe ſuppoſitions muſt conſiderably leſſen their eſtimation both of its doctrines and its precepts.

In the next place a wicked example, as we all know, tends to corrupt in ſome degree every one that lives within its baneful influence; more particularly if it be found in men of high rank, great wealth, ſplendid talents, profound erudition, or popular characters. The miſchief done by any notorious vices in men of this deſcription is inconceivable. It ſpreads like a peſtilence, and deſtroys thouſands in ſecrecy and ſilence, of whom the offender himſelf knows nothing, and whom probably he never meant to injure; and wherever the heart is corrupted, the principle of faith is proportionably weakened; for no man that gives a looſe to his paſſions will chooſe to have ſo troubleſome a monitor near him as the Goſpel. When he has learnt to diſregard the moral precepts of that divine volume, it requires but a very ſlight effort to reject its doctrines, and then to diſbelieve the truth of the whole.

A diſſolute life then, eſpecially in particular claſſes of men, is one certain way of making our brother to offend, not only in point of practice but of belief; and there is another method of producing the ſame effects, nearly allied to this, and that is *immoral publications*.

Theſe have the ſame tendency with bad examples, both in propagating vice and promoting infidelity; but they are ſtill more pernicious; becauſe the ſphere of their influence is more extenſive.

A bad example, though it operates fatally, operates comparatively within a ſmall circumference. It extends only to thoſe who are near enough to obſerve it, and fall

within the reach of the poiſonous infection that it ſpreads around it; but the contagion of a licentious publication, eſpecially if it be (as it too frequently is) in a popular and captivating ſhape, knows no bounds; it flies to the remoteſt corners of the earth; it penetrates the obſcure and retired habitations of ſimplicity and innocence; it makes its way into the cottage of the peaſant, into the hut of the ſhepherd, and the ſhop of the mechanic; it falls into the hands of all ages, ranks, and conditions; but it is peculiarly fatal to the unſuſpecting and unguarded minds of the youth of both ſexes; and to them its "breath is poiſon, and its touch is death."

What then have *they* to anſwer for who are every day obtruding theſe publications on the world, in a thouſand different ſhapes and forms, in hiſtory, in biography, in poems, in novels, in dramatic pieces? in all which the prevailing feature is *univerſal philanthrophy and indiſcriminate benevolence;* under the protection of which the hero of the piece has the privilege of committing whatever irregularities he thinks fit; and while he is violating the moſt ſacred obligations, inſinuating the moſt licentious ſentiments, and ridiculing every thing that looks like religion, he is nevertheleſs held up as a model of virtue; and though he may perhaps be charged with a few little venial foibles, and pardonable infirmities, (as they are called) yet we are aſſured that he has notwithſtanding *the very beſt heart in the world.* Thus it is that the principles of our youth are inſenſibly and almoſt unavoidably corrupted; and inſtead of being inſpired, as they ought to be, even upon the ſtage, with a juſt deteſtation of vice, they are furniſhed with apologies for it, which they never forget, and are even taught to conſider it as a neceſſary part of an accompliſhed character.

And as if we had not enough of this diſguſting nonſenſe and abominable profligacy in our own country, and in our own language, we are every day importing freſh ſamples of them from abroad, are ingrafting foreign immorality on our own native ſtock, and introducing characters on the ſtage, or into the cloſet, which are calculated to recommend the moſt licentious principles, and favor ir-

regularities and attachments that deſerve the ſevereſt reprehenſion and puniſhment.

Theſe are the ſeveral modes in which we may weaken or even deſtroy the moral and religious principles of very ſincere Chriſtians, or in the words of Scripture, *may make our brother to offend.* And whoever is guilty of *giving* this offence, ought moſt ſeriouſly to conſider the heavy puniſhment, and the bitter woe which our Lord here denounces againſt it. There is ſcarce any one ſin noticed by him, which he reprobates in ſuch ſtrong terms as this: "Who ſo ſhall *offend* one of theſe little ones which believe in me; it were better for him that a mill-ſtone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the ſea. Woe unto the world becauſe of offences; for it muſt needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh." Theſe are tremendous words; but we cannot wonder that our Lord ſhould expreſs himſelf thus ſtrongly, when we conſider the dreadful conſequences of ſpreading infidelity and immorality among our fellow-creatures. We diſtreſs them with doubts and ſcruples which never before entered into their thoughts; we rob them of the moſt invaluable bleſſings of life, of that heavenly conſolation and ſupport which is derived from religious ſentiments and virtuous habits; of that truſt and confidence in the Supreme Diſpoſer of all things, which gives eaſe and comfort to the afflicted ſoul; of that unſpeakable ſatisfaction which reſults from a conſcientious diſcharge of our duty; and of that *peace* of God which paſſeth all underſtanding. But what is ſtill worſe, we not only deprive them of the trueſt comforts of the preſent life, but we cut off all their hopes of happineſs in the next; we take from them the only ſure ground of pardon and acceptance; the death and merits of a crucified Redeemer: we bar up againſt them the gates of heaven, into which but for us they might have entered, and perhaps conſign them over to everlaſting perdition. Is not this beyond compariſon, the greateſt injury that one human creature can inflict upon another? And does it not juſtly merit that ſevere ſentence which our Lord has pronounced againſt it? Let then every one keep at the utmoſt diſtance from this moſt atrocious crime. Let every man

who commits his thoughts to the public, take especial care that nothing drop even incidentally from his pen that can offend those whom our Saviour calls *little children* that believe in him; that can either stagger their faith or corrupt their hearts. Let every father of a family be equally careful that nothing escape his lips in the unguarded hour of familiar converse, that can be dangerous to the religious principles of his children, his friends, or his servants; nothing that tends to lessen their reverence for the sacred writings, their respect for the doctrines, the precepts, or the sacred ordinances of religion, or raise any doubts or scruples in their minds respecting the truth or divine authority of the Christian revelation. I mention these things, because even the friends of religion are sometimes apt through mere inadvertence or thoughtlessness to indulge themselves in pleasantries even upon serious subjects, which though meant at the time merely to entertain their hearers, or to display their wit, yet often produce a very different effect, and sink much deeper into the minds of those that are present (especially of young people) than they are in the least aware of. More mischief may sometimes be done by incidental levities of this kind, than by grave discourses or elaborate writings against religion.

I have dwelt the longer on this interesting topic, because few people are aware of the enormity of the sin here reproved by our Lord, of the irreparable injury it may do to others, and of the danger to which it exposes themselves. But when they reflect, that by the commission of this crime they endanger the present peace and the future salvation of their fellow-creatures, and expose themselves to the woes which our Lord has in the passage before us denounced against those from whom these offences come, they will probably feel it their duty to be more guarded in this instance than men generally are; and will take heed to their ways that they offend not either with their pen or with their tongue.

I now go on with the remaining part of our Lord's admonition to his disciples.

After having said in the 7th verse, "Woe unto the world because of offences; for it must needs be that of-

ſences come, but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh;" he then adds, wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off and caſt them from thee; it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be caſt into everlaſting fire; and if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out and caſt it from thee; it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be caſt into hell fire."

Our Saviour here applies to the particular ſin which he was then condemning, the very ſame words which he had uſed before in his ſermon on the Mount with reference to the crime of adultery; and the meaning is this:

The henious ſin, againſt which I have been here cautioning you, that of offending your Chriſtian brethren, of cauſing them by your miſconduct to renounce their faith in me or to deſert the paths of virtue, has its origin in your depraved appetites and paſſions; as in the preſent inſtance it is your ambition, your eagerneſs after worldly honors and diſtinctions, which it is to be feared will give offence and ſcandal to thoſe that obſerve it, and may impreſs them with an unfavorable idea of that religion which ſeems to inſpire ſuch ſentiments. You muſt therefore go at once to the root of the evil, you muſt extirpate thoſe corrupt paſſions and propenſities that have taken poſſeſſion of your hearts, though it may be as difficult for you to part with them as it would be to pluck out an eye, or tear off a limb from the body. For it is better that you ſhould renounce what is moſt dear to you in this life, than that you ſhould ſuffer thoſe dreadful puniſhments in the next, which I have told you will aſſuredly be inflicted on all impenitent offenders, and more particularly on thoſe who offend in the way here ſpecified.

He then returns to the main ſubject of his exhortation: "take heed that ye deſpiſe not one of theſe little ones; for I ſay unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." That is, I again repeat to you, take heed that ye treat not with ſcorn and contempt ſuch little children as you now ſee

before you, or those believers in me who resemble these children in docility, meekness, humility, and indifference to all that the world calls great and honourable. Take care that you do not consider their welfare, their salvation, as below your notice and regard, and wantonly endanger both by giving way to your own irregular desires; for I say unto you, that however contemptibly you may think of them, your heavenly Father regards them with a more favorable eye. He even condescends to take them under his protection, he sends his most favored angels, those ministers of his that do his pleasure, and stand always in his presence ready to execute his commands, even these he deputes to guard and watch over these little children and those humble Christians, who are like them in purity and innocence of mind.

From this passage some have inferred, that every child, and every faithful servant of Christ, has an angel constantly attached to his person, to superintend, direct, and protect him; and this is the opinion of the learned Grotius himself; whilst others only suppose that those celestial spirits, who (as we are told of Gabriel) *stand before God*, are occasionally sent to assist the pious Christian in imminent danger, in severe trials, or great emergencies. And hence perhaps the favorite and popular doctrine of *guardian angels*; a doctrine which has prevailed more or less in every age of the church, which is without question most soothing and consolatory to human nature, and is certainly countenanced by this and several other passages of holy writ, as well as by the authority of Origen, Tertullian, and other ancient fathers and commentators. In the Psalms it is said, "The angel of the Lord tarrieth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them*." And in the Epistle to the Hebrews† we are told, that the angels are all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation." No one therefore that cherishes this notion can be charged with weakness or superstition; and if it should be at last an error, it is as Cicero says of the immortality of the soul, so delightful an error, that we

* Psal. xxxiv. 7. † Chap. i. 14.

cannot eaſily laſſent it to be wreſted from us.* But whatever may be the deciſion of learned men on this point, there is one thing moſt clearly proved by the text now before us, and confirmed by a multitude of others, and that is, the doctrine not only of a general but of a particular providence, which in one way or other, whether by miniſtering angels, or by the all-comprehending and omnipreſent eye of God himſelf, watches over thoſe true diſciples of Chriſt, who, in their tempers, diſpoſitions, and manners, approach neareſt to the humility, the meekneſs, the innocence, and the ſimplicity of a child.

This doctrine is indeed ſo diſtinctly and explicitly aſſerted in various parts of ſcripture, that it ſtands in no need of any confirmation from this particular paſſage; but every additional proof of ſo material a ſupport under the afflictions and calamities of life, muſt be grateful to every heart that has known what affliction is.

The verſe that comes next in order is this: "For the Son of man is come to ſave that which is loſt." The connexion of this verſe with the preceding one is ſomewhat obſcure, but ſeems to be as follows: You may think, perhaps that man is too mean, too inſignificant a being, to be worthy of the miniſtration and guardianſhip of celeſtial ſpirits. But how can you entertain this imagination, when you know that for this creature man, for fallen and ſinful man, did the Son of God condeſcend to offer himſelf up a ſacrifice on the croſs, and came to ſave that which was loſt! Well then may the angels of heaven be proud to guard what their Lord and Maſter came to ſave. Jeſus then goes on to exemplify, by a familiar ſimilitude, his paternal tenderneſs to the ſons of men. "How think ye, if a man have an hundred ſheep, and one of them be gone aſtray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and go into the mountains, and ſeeketh that which is gone aſtray? And if ſo be that he find it, verily I ſay unto

* The excellent Biſhop Andrews has, in one of his animated prayers, a paſſage which plainly ſhews that he believed this doctrine. It is as follows; "That the angel of peace, the holy guide of thy children, the faithful guard ſet by thee over their ſouls and bodies, may encamp round about me, and continually ſuggeſt to my mind ſuch things as conduce to thy glory, grant O good Lord!"

you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep than of the ninety and nine that went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father that one of these little ones should perish." We are not to infer from this similitude, that God sets more value, and looks with more complacency and approbation on one repenting sinner, than on ninety and nine righteous persons who have uniformly and devoutly served him. This can never be imagined; nor would it correspond with the illustration. The shepherd himself does not set a greater value upon the lost sheep than he does upon those that are safe; nor would he give up them to recover that which has strayed. But his joy *for the moment*, at the recovery of the lost sheep, is greater than he receives from all the rest, because he has regained that, and is sure of all the others. The whole, therefore, that was meant to be inculcated by this parable is, that God's parental tenderness extends to all, even to the sinner that goes astray, and that he rejoices at the conversion and recovery of the meanest individual, and of the most grievous offender. This is the very conclusion, and the only one which our Lord himself draws from the parable. "Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish."

Such then being the mercy of the Almighty even to his sinful creatures, our Lord goes on to intimate to his disciples, that *they* ought also to exercise a similar lenity and forbearance towards their offending brethren. "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone. If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established; and if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican." In this passage there are evident allusions to the laws and customs of the Jews, who, for the conviction of any offender, required the testimony of at least two witnesses*; and in the case of notorious and obstinate offenders, reproved

* Deut. xix. 15.

them publicly in their ſynagogues. But the obvious meaning in regard to ourſelves is, that even againſt thoſe who have ill-treated and injured us, we ſhould not immediately proceed to extreme ſeverity and rigour; but firſt try the effects of private, and gentle, and friendly admonition; if that fail, then call in two or three perſons of character and reputation to add weight and authority to our remonſtrances; and if that has no effect, we are then juſtified in bringing the offender before the proper tribunal, to be cenſured or puniſhed as he deſerves, avoiding all communication with him in future, except what common humanity may require even towards an enemy.—Theſe directions are evidently the dictates of that moderation, mildneſs, and benevolence, which characterize all our Saviour's precepts, and more particularly diſtinguiſh this chapter.

"Verily I ſay unto you," continues our Saviour, "whatſoever ye ſhall bind on earth ſhall be bound in heaven, and whatſoever ye ſhall looſe on earth ſhall be looſed in heaven. Again I ſay unto you, that if two of you ſhall agree on earth as touching any thing that they ſhall aſk, it ſhall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven; for where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midſt of them."

There is ſome difficulty and ſome difference of opinion with reſpect to the preciſe meaning of theſe verſes; but they evidently have a reference to the caſe of the offender ſtated in the preceding verſes; they are addreſſed excluſively to the apoſtles; and the moſt natural interpretation of them ſeems to be as follows: Whatever ſentence of abſolution or condemnation you ſhall in your appoſtolical capacity pronounce on any offender, that ſentence ſhall be confirmed in heaven: and whatever even two of you ſhall aſk in prayer for direction and aſſiſtance from above, in forming your judicial determinations, it ſhall be granted you; for where only two or three of you are gathered together in my name, and are acting under my authority and for my glory in any caſe of great importance, there am I in the midſt of you by my holy ſpirit, to guide, direct, and ſanction your proceedings.

We now come to one of the moſt intereſting and moſt affecting parables that is to be found either in ſcripture, or in any of the moſt admired writings of antiquity. In conſequence of what our Lord had ſaid in the courſe of his inſtructions on the ſubject of *injuries*, Peter came to him, and ſaid, "Lord, how oft ſhall my brother ſin againſt me and I forgive him, till ſeven times?" an allowance which he probably thought abundantly liberal. Jeſus ſaith unto him, "I ſay not unto thee until ſeven times, but until ſeventy times ſeven;" that is, this duty of forgiving injuries has no limits. However frequently you are injured, if real penitence and contrition follow the offence, a Chriſtian is always bound to forgive. To illuſtrate and confirm this important duty, our Lord ſubjoins the following parable. "Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a king, which would take account of his ſervants; and when he had began to reckon, one was brought to him which owed him ten thouſand talents, (that is nearly two millions, ſome think more than two millions of our money.) But for as much as he had not to pay, his Lord commanded him to be ſold, and his wife and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made." This ſeems a moſt ſevere penalty for inſolvency; and yet it was a frequent practice among the Jews*, as we learn both from various paſſages of the Old Teſtament and from Joſephus; and we are told by ſeveral intelligent travellers, that inſolvency is one of the cauſes of ſlavery in Africa at this very hour. So perfectly conformable to fact and to the truth of hiſtory is every circumſtance that occurs in the ſacred writings. "The ſervant therefore fell down and worſhipped him," proſtrated himſelf at his maſter's feet, and in the moſt moving terms beſought him ſaying, "Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all." Then the Lord of that ſervant was moved with compaſſion, and looſed him, and forgave him the debt. But the ſame ſervant went out, and found one of his fellow ſervants which owed him an hundred pence, (a very trifling ſum); and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, ſaying, "Pay me what thou oweſt." He aſſailed him with far greater violence and brutality

* Exod. xxii. 3. Lev. xxv. 47.

than his lord had uſed towards himſelf for a debt of ten thouſand talents. "And his fellow ſervant fell down at his feet, and beſought him, ſaying, "Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all;" the very ſame ſupplicating attitude, the very ſame affecting words that he had himſelf made uſe of towards his lord; "and he would not but went and caſt him into priſon till he ſhould pay the debt. So when his fellow ſervants ſaw what was done, they were very ſorry;" ſorry for the ſufferings of the unhappy debtor; ſorry for the diſgrace brought on human nature by the unfeeling creditor; "and they came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, ſaid unto him, O thou wicked ſervant, I forgave thee all that debt becauſe thou deſiredſt me; ſhouldeſt not thou alſo have had compaſſion on thy fellow ſervant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors till he ſhould pay all that was due to him. So likewiſe ſhall my heavenly Father do alſo unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their treſpaſſes."

Such is the parable of the unforgiving ſervant, which I am ſure has not only been heard but *felt* by every one here preſent. It requires no comment or explanation; the bare repetition of it is ſufficient: indeed it cannot be expreſſed in any other words than its own, without impairing its beauty and its ſtrength. Notwithſtanding the frequency of its recurrence in the courſe of our church ſervice, there is no one, I believe, that ever hears it without emotion and delight. Amidſt ſo much excellence as we meet with in the Goſpel, it is not eaſy to ſay what is moſt excellent; but if I was to ſelect any one parable of our Lord's as more intereſting, more affecting, coming more home to the feelings, and preſſing cloſer on the hearts of men than any other of the reſt, I think it would be this. Certain it is, that in all the characters of excellence, in perſpicuity, in brevity, in ſimplicity, in pathos, in force, it has no equal in any human compoſition whatever. On its beauties therefore, I ſhall not enlarge, but on its uſes and its application to ourſelves, I muſt ſay a few words.

And in the firſt place I would obſerve, that the object of this parable is not only to enforce the duty of cultivating a

placable disposition, but a disposition *constantly* placable, always ready to forgive the offences of our brother, however frequently he may repeat those offences. For it was immediately after our Lord had told Peter that he was to forgive his brother not merely seven times, but seventy times seven, that he added this parable to confirm that very doctrine; *therefore*, says he, is the kingdom of heaven like unto a certain king, &c. But then it is only upon this condition, that the offender is sincerely penitent, and entreats forgiveness. This is evident from the parallel passage in St. Luke, which expresses this condition: "If thy brother trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him*." Yet even this will to many people appear a hard saying, and will not very well agree with those high spirited passions, and that keen sense of injuries, which too generally prevail, and which instead of forgiving *repeated* offences, will listen to no entreaties, no expressions of contrition, even for a *single* one. But are you then content that your heavenly Father should deal out the same measure to you that you mete to your brother? Are you content that one single offence should exclude you for ever from the arms of his mercy? Are you not every day heaping up sin upon sin; do not you stand as much in need of daily forgiveness as you do of your daily bread; and do you think it an *excess* of indulgence, an overstrained degree of tenderness and compassion, that your Maker should pardon you seven times a day, or even seventy times seven?

2. In the next place I would remark, that this parable is a practical comment on that petition in the Lord's Prayer, "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us;" and it shews what infinite stress our divine Master lays on this duty of forgiveness, by the care he takes to enforce it in so many different ways, by this parable, by making it a part of our daily prayers, and by his repeated declarations that we must expect no mercy from our Maker "unless we from our hearts forgive every one his brother their trespasses†." To the same purpose are those irresistible words of St. Paul: "Be ye therefore

* Luke, xvii. 4. † Matth. xviii. 35.

kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Chriſt's ſake hath forgiven you*." Let the hard-hearted unrelenting man of the world, or the obdurate unforgiving parent, advert to theſe repeated admonitions, and then let him, if he can, indignantly ſpurn from him the repenting offender entreating pardon at his feet in thoſe heart-piercing words, "Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all."

And yet it is dreadful to ſtate, as I muſt do in the laſt place, what very little regard is paid to this precept by a large part of mankind.

No man, I believe, ever heard or read the parable before us without feeling his indignation riſe againſt the ungrateful and unfeeling ſervant, who, after having a debt of ten thouſand talents remitted to him by his indulgent Lord, threw his fellow ſervant into priſon for a debt of an hundred pence. And yet how frequently are we ourſelves guilty of the very ſame offence?

Who is there among us that has not had ten thouſand talents forgiven him by his heavenly Father? Take together all the offences of his life, all his ſins and follies from the firſt hour of his maturity to the preſent time, and they may well be compared to this immenſe ſum; which immenſe ſum, if he has been a ſincere penitent, has been all forgiven through the merits of his Redeemer. Yet when his fellow-chriſtian owes him an hundred pence, when he commits the ſlighteſt offence againſt him, he too often refuſes him forgiveneſs, though he fall at his feet to implore it.

In fact do we not every day ſee men reſenting not only real injuries, but ſlight and even imaginary offences, with extreme vehemence and paſſion, and ſometimes puniſhing the offender with nothing leſs than death? Do we not even ſee families rent aſunder, and all domeſtic tranquility and comfort deſtroyed frequently by the moſt trivial cauſes, ſometimes on one ſide, and ſometimes on both, refuſing to liſten to any reaſonable overtures of peace, haughtily re-

* Eph. iv. 32.

jecting all offers of reconciliation, inſiſting on the higheſt poſſible ſatisfaction and ſubmiſſion, and carrying theſe ſentiments of implacable rancour with them to the grave? And yet theſe people call themſelves Chriſtians, and expect to be themſelves forgiven at the throne of mercy!

Let then every man of this deſcription remember and moſt ſeriouſly reflect on this parable; let him remember that the unforgiving ſervant was delivered over to the tormentors till he ſhould pay the uttermoſt farthing. Let him recollect that all the world approves this ſentence; that he himſelf cannot but approve it; that he cannot but feel himſelf to be preciſely in the ſituation of that very ſervant, and that of courſe he muſt at the laſt tremendous day expect that bitter and unanſwerable reproach from his offended Judge: "O thou wicked ſervant! I forgave thee all that debt becauſe thou deſiredſt me; ſhouldeſt not thou alſo have had compaſſion on thy fellow ſervant even as I had pity on thee?"

LECTURE XVII.

MATTHEW xix.

THE paſſage of Scripture which I propoſe to explain in the preſent Lecture, is a part of the 19th chapter of St. Matthew, beginning at the 16th verſe.

"Behold," ſays the evangeliſt, "one came and ſaid unto him (meaning Jeſus) Good Maſter, what good thing ſhall I do that I may have eternal life? And he ſaid unto him, Why calleſt thou me good? there is none good but one, that is God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He ſaith unto him, Which? Jeſus ſaid, Thou ſhalt do no murder, thou ſhalt not commit adultery, thou ſhalt not ſteal, thou ſhalt not bear falſe witneſs. Honour thy father and thy mother: and, thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf. The young man ſaith unto him, All theſe things have I kept from my youth up, what lack I yet? Jeſus ſaid unto him, If thou wilt be *perfect*, go and ſell that thou haſt, and give to the poor, and thou ſhalt have treaſure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that ſaying, he went away ſorrowful: for he had great poſſeſſions."

The converſation here related between the young ruler (for ſo he is called by St. Luke) and our bleſſed Lord, cannot but be extremely intereſting to every ſincere Chriſtain, who is anxious about his own ſalvation. A young man of high rank, and of large poſſeſſions, came with great haſte and eagerneſs; came *running*, as St. Mark expreſſes it, to Jeſus; and throwing himſelf at his feet, propoſed to him this moſt important queſtion: "Good Maſter, what good thing ſhall I do, that I may have eternal life?" This was not a queſtion of mere curioſity, or an inſidious one, as the queſtions put to our Lord (ef-

pecially by the rulers) frequently were, but appears to have been dictated by a ſincere and anxious wiſh to be inſtructed in the way to that everlaſting life, which he found Jeſus held out to his diſciples. His conduct had been conformable to the precepts of that religion in which he was born and educated, the religion of Moſes; for when our Lord pointed out to him the commandments he was to keep, his anſwer was, "all theſe things have I kept from my youth up;" and his diſpoſition alſo, we muſt conclude, to have been an amiable one; for we are told that Jeſus *loved him*, beheld him with a certain degree of regard and affection. In this ſtate of mind then he came to Jeſus, and aſked the queſtion already ſtated; "Good Maſter, what good thing ſhall I do that I may have eternal life?"

Our Lord's anſwer was, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. The young man ſaith unto him, Which? Jeſus ſaid, Thou ſhalt do no murder, thou ſhalt not commit adultery, thou ſhalt not ſteal, thou ſhalt not bear falſe witneſs. Honor thy father and thy mother: and, thou ſhalt love thy neighbor as thyſelf." In this enumeration, it is obſervable that our Lord does not recite *all* the ten commandments, but only five out of thoſe that compoſe what is called the ſecond table. Now we cannot imagine that Jeſus meant to ſay that the obſervation of a *few* of God's commands would put the young man in poſſeſſion of eternal life. His intention unqueſtionably was, by a very common figure of ſpeech, to make a part ſtand for the whole; and inſtead of enumerating *all* the commandments, to ſpecify only a few, which were to repreſent the reſt. Thou ſhalt do no murder, thou ſhalt not commit adultery, and ſo of all the other commandments, to which my reaſoning equally applies." Nor does he only include in his injunction the ten commandments, but *all* the moral commandments, of God contained in the law of Moſes; for he mentions one which is not to be found in the ten commandments: "Thou ſhalt love thy neighbor as thyſelf." This therefore points out to the young man his obligations to obſerve all the other moral precepts of the law. "The young man ſaith unto him, all theſe things have I kept from my youth up; what lack I yet?" The probability is, that he flattered

himſelf he lacked nothing; that his obedience to the moral law rendered him *perfect*, qualified him to become a diſciple and follower of Chriſt here, and gave him a *claim* to a ſuperior degree of felicity hereafter. It was to repreſs theſe imaginations, which Jeſus ſaw riſing in his mind, that he gave him the following anſwer; an anſwer which ſtruck the young man with aſtoniſhment and grief, and which ſome have repreſented as more harſh and ſevere than his conduct merited. "If thou wilt be perfect, go and ſell that thou haſt, and give to the poor, and thou ſhalt have treaſure in heaven, and come and follow me." In the parallel place of St. Mark, it is, "Come and take up the croſs and follow me." The meaning is, although God is pleaſed to accept graciouſly your obedience to the moral law, yet you muſt not flatter yourſelf that your obedience is *perfect*; and that this perfect obedience gives you a *right* or *claim* to eternal life; much leſs to a ſuperior degree of reward in heaven; far from it. To convince you how far you fall ſhort of *perfection*, I will put your obedience to the teſt, in a trying inſtance, and you ſhall then judge whether you are ſo perfect as you ſuppoſe yourſelf. You ſay that you have from your youth kept the moral laws delivered to you by Moſes. Now one of thoſe laws is this, "Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy ſoul, and with all thy might." If therefore you pretend to perfection, you muſt obſerve this law as well as all the reſt, and conſequently you muſt prefer his favor to every thing elſe; you muſt be ready to ſacrifice to his commands every thing that is moſt valuable to you in this world. I now therefore as a teacher ſent from God, require you to ſell all you have, and give to the poor, and follow me, and you ſhall then have treaſure in heaven. The young man made no reply. He could not. He ſaw all his pretenſions to *perfection*, his hopes of an *extraordinary* reward, vaniſh at once. He was not diſpoſed to purchaſe even treaſures in heaven at the price of all he poſſeſſed on earth. He therefore went away ſilent and ſorrowful, for he had great poſſeſſions.

There is a queſtion which I ſuppoſe naturally ariſes in every man's mind, on reading this converſation between the young ruler and Jeſus. Does the injunction here given to

the young man by Jeſus relate to *all* Chriſtians in general, and are we all of us, without exception, bound to ſell all that we have and give to the poor, as a neceſſary condition of obtaining treaſure in heaven? The anſwer is, moſt aſſuredly not. Our Lord's command refers ſolely to the individual perſon to whom he addreſſed himſelf, or at the moſt to thoſe who at that time became diſciples of Chriſt. I have already ſhewn that our Saviour's object, in giving this command to the young man, was probably to lower the high opinion he ſeemed to entertain of *his perfect* obedience to the laws of Moſes, to convince him that *he* was very far from that exalted ſtate of piety and virtue to which he pretended, and that if he was rewarded with eternal life, it muſt be not in conſequence of his own righteouſneſs, but of the mercy of God, and the merits of a Redeemer, as yet unknown to him.

But beſides this, it is not improbable that the young ruler was ambitious to enliſt under the banners of Chriſt, and to become one of his diſciples and followers. And at that time no one could do this whoſe time and thoughts were engaged in worldly concerns, and in the care and management and attendant luxuries of a large *fortune*. Nor was this all; every man that embarked in ſo perilous an undertaking, did it at the riſque not only of his property, but even of life itſelf, from the perſecuting ſpirit of the Jewiſh rulers. When, therefore, our Saviour ſays to the young man, if thou wilt be *perfect*, that is, if thou art deſirous to profeſs the more perfect religion of the Goſpel, and to become one of my followers, go and ſell that thou haſt, and give to the poor, and take up the croſs and follow me; he only prepares him for the great hardſhips and dangers to which *every* follower of Chriſt was *then* expoſed, and the neceſſity there was for him to ſit looſe to every thing moſt valuable in the preſent life.

This command, therefore, does not in its primary meaning relate to Chriſtians of the preſent times; nor indeed to Chriſtians at all, properly ſpeaking, but to thoſe who were at *that time* deſirous of becoming ſo.

But though in a ſtrict and literal ſenſe it cannot be applied to ourſelves, yet in its principle and in its general import, it conveys a moſt uſeful and moſt important leſſon to Chriſtians in every age and in every nation; it is an admonition to them not to pique themſelves too much on their exact obedience to all the divine commands, not to aſſume to themſelves ſo much perfection, as to found upon it a *right* and a *claim* to eternal life; not to rely ſolely on their own righteouſneſs, but on the merits of their Redeemer, for acceptance and ſalvation. It reminds them alſo, that they ought always to be prepared to yield an implicit obedience to the commands of their Maker; and that if their duty to him ſhould at any time require it, they ſhould not heſitate to renounce their deareſt intereſts and moſt favorite pleaſures; to part with fame, with fortune, and even life itſelf; and, under all circumſtances, to conſider in the firſt place what it is that God requires at their hands, and to ſubmit to it, whatever it may coſt them, without a murmur.

After this converſation with the young ruler, follows the obſervation made by our Lord on this remarkable incident. Then ſaid Jeſus unto his diſciples, "Verily I ſay unto you, that a rich man ſhall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I ſay unto you, it is eaſier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." When his diſciples heard it they were amazed, ſaying, "who then can be ſaved?" But Jeſus beheld them, and ſaid unto them, "With men this is impoſſible, but with God all things are poſſible." This ſentence paſſed upon the rich is a declaration, which if underſtood literally, and as applying to *all* Chriſtians of the preſent day, who may juſtly be called *rich*, would be truly terrifying and alarming to a very large deſcription of men, a much larger than may at firſt perhaps be imagined. For by rich men muſt be underſtood, not only thoſe of high rank and large poſſeſſions, but thoſe in every rank of life, who have any ſuperfluity beyond what is neceſſary for the decent and comfortable ſupport of themſelves and their families. Theſe are all to be conſidered as *rich* in a greater or leſs degree, and this of courſe muſt comprehend a very large

part of the Chriſtian world. Does then our Lord mean to ſay, that it is ſcarce poſſible for ſuch vaſt numbers of Chriſtians to be ſaved? This does certainly at the firſt view ſeem to be implied in that very ſtrong expreſſion, that it is eaſier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven." But it may fairly be preſumed, that it was not our Lord's intention to pronounce ſo very ſevere and diſcouraging a ſentence as this, and to render the way *to heaven* almoſt inacceſſible to ſo very conſiderable a number *of his* diſciples. And in fact on a careful conſideration of *this* paſſage, of the limitations and abatements neceſſary to be made in proverbial expreſſions and oriental idioms, and *of* the explanations given of it in other parts of Scripture, and even by our Lord himſelf, it will appear that *there is* nothing in it which ought to inſpire terror and diſmay *into* the heart of any ſincere and real Chriſtian, be his ſituation ever ſo exalted or affluent.

It muſt be obſerved then in the firſt place, what is exceedingly important in this enquiry, that in its original application, this paſſage does not ſeem to have attached upon thoſe who were then actually diſciples of Chriſt, but upon thoſe only who were deſirous of becoming ſo; for conſider only the occaſion which gave riſe to this reflection. It was that very incident on which we have juſt been commenting; that of the young rich ruler whom our Saviour exhorted to ſell all that he had and take up his croſs and follow him. The young man not reliſhing theſe conditions, inſtead of following Jeſus, went away ſorrowful, becauſe he had great poſſeſſions. He therefore never was, as far as we know, a diſciple of Chriſt; and it was upon this that Jeſus immediately declared, that "a rich man ſhall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven;" that is, ſhall hardly be induced to embrace the Chriſtian religion; for that is frequently the ſignification of the *kingdom of heaven*, in Scripture. What then our Lord affirmed was this, that it was extremely difficult at that time, at the firſt preaching of the Goſpel, for any rich man to become a convert to Chriſtianity. And this we may eaſily believe; for thoſe who were enjoying all the comforts and elegancies, and luxuries of life, would not be very ready to ſacrifice

theſe, and ſubmit to poverty, hardſhips, perſecutions, and even death itſelf, to which the firſt converts to Chriſtianity were frequently expoſed. They would therefore generally follow the example of the rich man before us: would turn their backs on the kingdom of heaven, and go away to the world and its enjoyments. And this in fact we know to have been the caſe. For it was of the lower ranks of men that our Lord's diſciples *principally* conſiſted, and we are expreſsly told that it was the common people chiefly that heard him gladly; and even after his death, St. Paul aſſerts that not many mighty, not many noble, were called. It ſhould ſeem then, that the primary objects of this declaration were thoſe rich men to whom the Goſpel was *then* offered, and of whom very few embraced it. And as no penal law ought to be ſtretched beyond its ſtrict and literal ſenſe, I do not conceive that we are *authoriſed* to apply this ſevere ſentence to thoſe opulent perſons who now profeſs themſelves Chriſtians, and to ſay of them that it is eaſier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to inherit the rewards of heaven. Still however, as the words themſelves will perhaps bear ſuch an application, it is not improbable that our Lord might have an eye to rich men in future profeſſing Chriſtianity, as well as to the rich men of thoſe days, who were either Jews or Heathens. But if it *does* relate to rich Chriſtians at all, I have no difficulty in ſaying, that it muſt be in a very qualified and mitigated ſenſe of the words, ſuch as ſhall not bar up the gates of heaven againſt any true believers in Chriſt, or inſpire terror and deſpair, where friendly admonition was only meant.

The firſt thing then to be remarked is, that although the ſimilitude here made uſe of, that of a camel paſſing through the eye of a needle, implies abſolute impoſſibility, yet according to every rule of interpreting oriental proverbs (for ſuch this is) it means only, in its application, *great difficulty*. And in this ſenſe it was actually uſed both by the Jews and the Arabians; and is plainly ſo interpreted by our Lord, when he ſays that a rich man ſhall *hardly* enter into the kingdom of heaven.

But even in this ſenſe the words do not apply to all rich men without diſtinction. For in the parallel place of St. Mark[a], upon the diſciples expreſſing their aſtoniſhment at our Lord's declaration, he immediately explains himſelf by ſaying, how *hard* is it for them that *truſt* in riches to enter into the kingdom of heaven; and it is *after* this explanation, that the proverbial paſſage follows, "it is eaſier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven."

We ſee then that thoſe rich men only are meant, who *truſt* in their riches, who place their whole *dependence* upon them; whoſe views and hopes are centered in them and them only; who place their whole happineſs, not in relieving the diſtreſſes of the poor, and ſoothing the ſorrows of the afflicted; not in acts of worſhip and adoration, and thankſgiving to him from whoſe bounty they derive every bleſſing they enjoy; not in giving him their hearts, and dedicating their wealth to his glory and his ſervice, but in amaſſing it without end, or ſquandering it without any benefit to mankind, in making it the inſtrument of pleaſure, of luxury, of diſſipation, of vice, and the means of gratifying every irregular appetite and paſſion without controul. Theſe are the rich men, whoſe ſalvation is repreſented by our Saviour to be almoſt impoſſible; and yet even with reſpect to theſe he adds; with men this is impoſſible, but with God all things are poſſible; that is, although if we look to human means, to human ſtrength alone, it ſeems utterly impoſſible that ſuch men as theſe ſhould ever repent and be ſaved; yet to the power of God, to the overruling influences of the Holy Spirit nothing is impoſſible. His grace ſhed abroad in the heart may touch it with compunction and remorſe, may awaken it to penitence, may heal all its corruptions, may illuminate, may purify may ſanctify it, may bring the moſt worldly-minded man to a ſenſe of his condition, and make him tranſfer his truſt from riches to the LIVING GOD.

It is then to thoſe that *truſt* in riches that this denunciation of our Lord peculiarly applies; but even to *all rich men in*

[a] Mark x. 24.

general it holds out this moſt important admonition, that their ſituation is at the beſt a ſituation of difficulty and danger; that their riches furniſh them with ſo many opportunities of indulging every wayward wiſh, every corrupt propenſity of their hearts, and ſpread before them ſo many temptations, ſo many incitements, ſo many provocations to luxury, intemperance, ſenſuality, pride, forgetfulneſs of God, and contempt of every thing ſerious and ſacred, that it is ſometimes too much for human nature to bear; that they have therefore peculiar need to take heed to their ways, to watch inceſſantly over their own conduct, to keep their hearts with all diligence, to guard the iſſues of life and death, and above all, to implore with unceaſing earneſtneſs and fervor that help from above, thoſe communications of divine grace, which can alone enable them, and which will effectually enable them to overcome the world, and to vanquiſh all the powerful enemies they have to contend with. They have in ſhort their way plainly marked out to them in ſcripture, and the cleareſt directions given them how they are to conduct themſelves, ſo as to become *partakers of everlaſting life*. "Charge them, ſays St. Paul, that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor truſt in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to diſtribute, willing to communicate, laying up in ſtore for themſelves a good foundation againſt the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life*."

This ſtriking charge to the rich is pregnant with moſt important and wholeſome counſel, and is an admirable comment on that very paſſage which has ſo long engaged our attention. It ſeems indeed to allude and refer to it, and points out all thoſe diſtinctions which tend to explain away its ſeeming harſhneſs, and aſcertain its true ſpirit and meaning.

It cautions the rich men of the world not to *truſt* in uncertain riches: the very expreſſion made uſe of by our Lord, and the very circumſtance which renders it ſo *hard*

* Tim. vi. 17—19.

for them to enter into the kingdom of heaven. They are enjoined to place their truſt in THE LIVING GOD. They are to be rich in a far brighter treaſure than gold and ſilver, in faith and in good works; and if they are, they will "lay a good foundation againſt the time to come, and will *lay hold* on eternal life." This entirely does away all the terror, all the diſmay, which our Lord's denunciation might tend to produce in the minds of the wealthy and the great: it proves that the way to heaven is as open to *them*, as to all other ranks and conditions of men, and it points out to them the very means by which they may arrive there. Theſe means are, truſt in the living God, dedication of themſelves to his ſervice and his glory, zeal in every good work, and more particularly the appropriation of a large part of that very wealth, which conſtitutes their danger, to the purpoſes of piety, charity, and beneficence. Theſe are the ſteps by which they muſt, through the merits of their Redeemer, aſcend to heaven. Thoſe riches which are their natural enemies, muſt be converted into allies and friends. They muſt, as the ſcripture expreſſes it, make to themſelves "friends of the mammon of unrighteouſneſs*;" they muſt be rich towards God; they muſt turn that wealth, which is too often the cauſe of their perdition, into an inſtrument of ſalvation, into an *inſtrument* by which they may *lay hold*, as the apoſtle expreſſes it, on eternal life.

Before I quit this intereſting paſſage, it may be of uſe to obſerve, that while it furniſhes a leſſon of great caution, vigilance, and circumſpection to the rich, it affords alſo no ſmall degree of conſolation to the poor. If they are leſs bountifully provided than the rich, with the materials of happineſs for the preſent life, let them however be thankful to Providence that they have fewer difficulties to contend with, fewer temptations to combat, and fewer obſtacles to ſurmount, in their way to the life which is to come. They have fortunately no means of indulging themſelves in that luxury and diſſipation, thoſe extravagances and exceſſes which ſometimes diſgrace the wealthy and the great; and they are preſerved from many follies, imprudences, and ſins, equally injurious to preſent comfort and future happineſs.

* Luke, xvi. 9.

If they are deſtitute of all the elegancies and many of the conveniences and accommodations of life, they are alſo exempt from thoſe cares and anxieties which frequently corrode the heart, and perhaps more than balance the enjoyments of their ſuperiors. The inferiority of their condition ſecures them from all the dangers and all the torments of ambition and pride; it produces in them generally that meekneſs and lowlineſs of mind, which is the chief conſtituent of a true evangelical temper, and one of the moſt eſſential qualifications for the kingdom of heaven.

Jeſus having made theſe obſervations on the conduct of the young ruler, who refuſed to part with his wealth and follow him, Peter thought this a fair opportunity of aſking our Lord what reward ſhould be given to him, and the other apoſtles, who had actually done what the young ruler had not the courage and the virtue to do. Then anſwered Peter and ſaid unto him, "Lo! *we* have forſaken all, and followed thee; what ſhall we have therefore?" It is true the apoſtles had no wealth to relinquiſh, but what little they had they cheerfully parted with; they gave up their *all*, they took up their croſs and followed Chriſt. Surely after ſuch a ſacrifice they might well be allowed to aſk what recompence they might expect, and nothing can be more natural and affecting than their appeal to their divine Maſter: "Behold, *we* have forſaken all, and followed thee; what ſhall *we* have therefore?" Our Lord felt the force and the juſtice of this appeal, and immediately gave them this moſt gracious and conſolatory anſwer: "Verily I ſay unto you, that ye which have followed me in the regeneration, when the Son of man ſhall ſit in the throne of his glory, ye alſo ſhall ſit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Iſrael: and every one that hath forſaken houſes, or brethren, or ſiſters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's ſake, ſhall receive an hundred fold, and ſhall inherit everlaſting life."

Our tranſlators, by connecting the word *regeneration* with the preceding words, "ye which have followed me in the regeneration," evidently ſuppoſed that word to

relate to the firſt preaching of the Goſpel, when thoſe who heard and received it were to be regenerated or made new creatures.

But moſt of the ancient fathers, as well as the beſt modern commentators, refer that expreſſion to the words that follow it, "in the regeneration when the Son of man ſhall ſit in the throne of his glory;" by which is meant the day of judgment and of recompence, when all mankind ſhall be as it were regenerated or born again, by riſing from their graves; and when, as St. Matthew tells us in the 27th chapter (making uſe of the very ſame phraſe that he does here) the Son of man ſhall ſit on the throne of his glory. At that ſolemn hour Jeſus tells his apoſtles that they ſhall alſo ſit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Iſrael. This is an alluſion to the cuſtom of princes having their great men ranged around them as aſſeſſors and adviſers when they ſit in council or in judgment: or more probably to the Jewiſh ſanhedrim, in which the high prieſt ſat ſurrounded by the principal rulers, chief prieſts, and doctors of the law; and it was meant only to expreſs, in theſe figurative terms, that the apoſtles ſhould in the kingdom of heaven have a diſtinguiſhed pre-eminence of glory and reward, and a place of honor aſſigned them near the perſon of our Lord himſelf.

Jeſus then goes on to ſay, "every one that hath forſaken houſes, or brethren, or ſiſters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's ſake, ſhall receive an hundred fold, and ſhall inherit everlaſting life." It is plain, both from the conſtruction of this verſe, and from the expreſs words of St. Mark in the parallel paſſage, that the reward here promiſed to the apoſtles, whatever it might be, was to be beſtowed in the *preſent world*; beſides which they were to inherit everlaſting life.

What then, it may be aſked, is this recompence, which was to take place in the preſent life, and was to be a *hundred fold?* It certainly cannot be a hundred fold of thoſe worldly advantages which are ſuppoſed to be relinquiſhed for the ſake of Chriſt and his religion; for a multiplication of ſeveral of theſe things, inſtead of a

reward, would have been an incumbrance. And we know in fact the apoſtles never did abound in worldly poſſeſſions, but were for the moſt part deſtitute and poor. The recompence then here promiſed muſt have been of a very different nature; it is that internal content and ſatisfaction of mind, that peace of God which paſſeth all underſtanding, thoſe delights of a pure conſcience and an upright heart, that affectionate ſupport of all good men, thoſe conſolations of the Holy Spirit, that truſt and confidence in God, that conſciouſneſs of the divine favor and approbation, thoſe reviving hopes of everlaſting glory, which every good man and ſincere Chriſtian never fails to experience in the diſcharge of his duty. Theſe are the things which will cheer his heart and ſuſtain his ſpirits, amidſt all the diſcouragements he meets with, under the preſſure of want, of poverty, of affliction, of calumny, of ridicule, of perſecution, and even under the terrors of death itſelf, which will recompence him *a hundred fold* for all the ſacrifices he has made to Chriſt and his religion, and impart to him a degree of comfort and tranquillity and happineſs, far beyond any thing that all the wealth and ſplendour of this world can beſtow. That this is not a mere ideal repreſentation, we may ſee in the example of thoſe very perſons to whom this diſcourſe of our Saviour was addreſſed. We may ſee a picture of the felicity here deſcribed, drawn by the maſterly hand of St. Paul, in his Second Epiſtle to the Corinthians. "We are, ſays he (ſpeaking of himſelf and his fellow-labourers in the Goſpel) we are approving ourſelves in much patience, in afflictions, in neceſſities, in diſtreſſes, in ſtripes, in impriſonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in faſtings; by pureneſs, by knowledge, by long-ſuffering, by kindneſs, by the Holy Ghoſt, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteouſneſs on the right hand and on the left, by honor and diſhonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chaſtened, and not killed; as ſorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet poſſeſſing all things." We have here a portrait, not merely of patience and fortitude, but of *cheerfulneſs and joy* under the accuteſt ſufferings, which

is no where to be met with in the writings of the moſt celebrated heathen philoſophers. The utmoſt that *they* pretended to was a contempt of pain, a determination not to be ſubdued by it, and not even to acknowledge that it was an evil. But we never hear them expreſſing that cheerfulneſs and joy under ſuffering, which we here ſee in the appoſtles and firſt diſciples of Chriſt. Indeed it was impoſſible that they ſhould riſe to theſe extraordinary exertions of the human mind, ſince they wanted all thoſe ſupports which bore up the appoſtles under the ſevereſt calamities, and raiſed them above all the common weakneſſes and infirmities of their nature; namely, the conſciouſneſs of being embarked in the greateſt and nobleſt undertaking that ever engaged the mind of man, an unbounded truſt and confidence in the protection of heaven, a large participation of the divine influences and conſolations of the Holy Spirit, and a firm and well grounded hope of an eternal reward in another life, which would infinitely overpay all their labors and their ſorrows in this. Theſe were the ſources of that content and cheerfulneſs, that vigour and vivacity of mind, under the ſevereſt afflictions, which nothing could depreſs, and which nothing but Chriſtian philoſophy could produce.

Here then we have a full explanation of our Lord's promiſe in the paſſage before us, that every one who had forſaken houſes, or brethren, or ſiſters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for his name's ſake, ſhould receive a hundred fold, ſhould receive abundant recompence in the comfort of their own minds, as deſcribed in the correſponding paſſage of St. Paul, juſt cited; which may be conſidered not only as an admirable comment on our Lord's declaration, but as an exact fulfilment of the prediction contained in it. For that declaration is plainly prophetic; it foretels the perſecution his diſciples would meet with in the diſcharge of their duty; and foretels alſo, that in the midſt of theſe perſecutions they would be undaunted and joyful. And there cannot be a more perfect completion of any prophecy, than that which St. Paul's deſcription ſets before us with reſpect to this.

But we muſt not confine this promiſe of our Saviour's to his own immediate followers and diſciples; it extends

to all his faithful servants in every age and nation of the world, that part with any thing which is dear and valuable to them for the sake of the Gospel. Whoever has passed any time in the world, must have seen that every man who is sincere in the profession of his religion, who sets God always before him, and who seeks above all things his favor and approbation, must sometimes make great and painful sacrifices to the commands of his Maker and Redeemer; and whoever does so, whoever gives up his pleasures, his interests, his fame, his favorite pursuits, his fondest wishes, and his strongest passions, for the sake of his duty, and in conformity to the will of his heavenly Father, may rest assured, that he shall in no wise lose his reward. He shall in a degree proportioned to the self-denial he has exercised, and the sufferings he has undergone, experience the present comfort and support here promised to the apostles; and shall also, though not to the same extent, have an extraordinary recompence in the kingdom of heaven.

Let no one then be deterred from persevering in the path of duty, whatever discouragements, difficulties, or obstructions he may meet with in his progress, either from the struggles he has with his own corrupt affections, or from the malevolence of the world. Let him not fear to encounter, what he must expect to meet with, opposition, contumely, contempt and ridicule; let him not fear the enmity of profligate and unprincipled men; but let him go on undaunted and undismayed in that uniform tenor of piety and benevolence, of purity, integrity, and uprightness of conduct, which will not fail to bring him peace at the last. Let him not be surprized or alarmed if he is not exempt from the common lot of every sincere and zealous Christian; if he finds it by his own experience to be true, what an apostle of Christ has long since prepared him to expect, that whosoever will live godly in Christ Jesus shall in one way or other *suffer persecution*. But let him remember at the same time the reviving and consolatory declaration of his divine Master; "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven."

LECTURE XVIII.

MATTH. xxii.

I NOW paſs on to the twenty-ſecond chapter of St. Matthew, in which our bleſſed Lord introduces the following parable:

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his ſon, and ſent forth his ſervants to call them that were bidden to the wedding, and they would not come. Again he ſent forth other ſervants, ſaying, tell them which are bidden, Behold I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready; come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandize; and the remnant took his ſervants and entreated them ſpitefully, and ſlew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth; and he ſent forth his armies, and deſtroyed thoſe murderers, and burnt up their city. Then ſaith he to his ſervants, the wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye ſhall find, bid to the marriage. So thoſe ſervants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they could find, both bad and good, and the wedding was furniſhed with gueſts. And when the king came in to ſee the gueſts, he ſaw there a man which had not on a wedding garment. And he ſaith unto him, Friend, how cameſt thou in hither, not having on a wedding garment? and he was ſpeechleſs. Then ſaid the king to his ſervants, bind him hand and foot, and caſt him into outer darkneſs; there ſhall be weeping and gnaſhing of teeth; for many are called, but few are choſen."

The primary and principal object of this parable is to repreſent, under the image of a marriage feaſt, the

invitation given to the Jews to embrace the Gospel, their rejection of that gracious offer, the severe punishment inflicted upon them for their ingratitude and obstinacy, and the admission of the Heathens to the privileges of Christianity in their room.

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son."

That is, the dispensations of the Almighty, *with respect* to the Christian religion, which is called the kingdom of heaven, may be compared to the conduct of a certain king, who (as was the custom in those times, especially among the eastern nations) gave a splendid feast in consequence of his son's marriage. And in this comparison there is a peculiar propriety, because both the Jewish and the Christian covenant are frequently represented in Scripture under the similitude of a marriage contract between God and his people*. "And he sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding, and they would not come. Again he sent forth other servants, saying, tell them which are bidden, Behold I have prepared *my dinner*; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready; come unto the marriage." This signifies the various and repeated offers of the Gospel to the Jews; first by John the Baptist, then by our Saviour himself, then by his apostles and the seventy disciples, both before and after his ascension.

But all these gracious offers the greater part of the nation rejected with scorn. They would not come to the marriage; they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise; and the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. They not only slighted and treated with contempt the words of eternal life, and preferred the pleasures and the interests of the present life to all the joys of heaven, but they pursued, with unceasing rancour, the first preachers of the Gospel, and persecuted them even unto death.

* See Isaiah liv. 5. Jeremiah iii. 8. Matth. xxv. 5. 2 Cor. xi. 2.

"But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth; and he ſent forth his armies, and deſtroyed theſe murderers, and burnt up their city." This points out, in the plaineſt terms, the Roman armies under Veſpaſian and Titus, which not many years after this was ſpoken, beſieged Jeruſalem, and deſtroyed the city, and ſlaughtered an immenſe number of the inhabitants. This terrible devaſtation our Lord here predicts in general terms, as he does more particularly and minutely in the twenty-fourth chapter; and he here repreſents it as the judgment of God on this perverſe and obſtinate people for their rejection of the Chriſtian religion, their ſavage treatment of the apoſtles and their aſſociates, and their many other atrocious crimes. This puniſhment however is here, by anticipation, repreſented as having been inflicted during the marriage feaſt; though it did not in fact take place till afterwards, till after the Goſpel had been for ſome time promulgated.

"Then ſaid he to his ſervants, the wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye ſhall find bid to the marriage. So thoſe ſervants went out into the high-ways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good; and the wedding was furniſhed with gueſts."

It may be thought, perhaps, at the firſt view, that our Lord has here introduced a circumſtance not very natural or probable. It may be imagined that at a magnificent royal entertainment, if any of the gueſts happened to fail in their attendance, a great king would never think of ſupplying their places by ſending his ſervants into the highways to collect together all the travellers and ſtrangers they could meet with, and make them ſit down at the marriage feaſt. But ſtrange as this may ſeem, there is ſomething that approaches very near to it in the cuſtoms of the eaſtern nations, even in modern times. For a traveller of great credit and reputation, Dr. Pococke, informs us, that an Arab prince will often dine in the ſtreet before his door, and call to all that paſs, even to beggars, in the name of God, and they come and ſit down to table;

and when they have done, retire with the uſual form of returning thanks*.

This adds one more proof to the many others I have already pointed out in the courſe of theſe Lectures, of the exact correſpondence of the various facts and circumſtances recorded in the ſacred writings to the truth of hiſtory, and to ancient oriental cuſtoms and manners.

This part of the parable alludes to the *calling in* of the Gentiles or Heathens to the privileges of the Goſpel, after they had been haughtily rejected by the Jews. This was firſt done by St. Peter in the inſtance of Cornelius, and afterwards extended to the Gentiles at large by him and the other apoſtles, conformable to what our Lord declares in another place†. "Many ſhall come from the *eaſt* and from the weſt, and ſhall ſit down with Abraham, and Iſaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God; but the children of the kingdom (that is the Jews) ſhall be ſhut out." And in the gracious invitation, no exceptions, no diſtinctions were to be made. The ſervants gathered together *all* as many as they found, both *bad* and *good*; men of all characters and deſcriptions were to have the offers of mercy and ſalvation made to them, even the very worſt of ſinners; for it was theſe chiefly that our Saviour came to call to repentance; "for they that are whole need not a phyſician, but they that are ſick‡;" and of theſe great numbers did actually embrace the gracious offers made to them; for our Lord told the Jews, "the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you‖."

In this manner was the wedding furniſhed with gueſts. "And when the king came in to ſee the gueſts, he ſaw there a man which had not on a wedding garment; and he ſaid unto him, Friend, how cameſt thou in hither, not having a wedding garment? and he was ſpeechleſs. Then ſaid the king to the ſervants, bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and caſt him into outer darkneſs; there ſhall be weeping and gnaſhing of teeth: for many are called, but few are choſen."

* Pococke, vol. i. p. 57. and 182. See alſo Diod. Sic. l. xiii. p. 375, 376.

† Matth. viii. 11. ‡ Ib. ix, 12. ‖ Ib. xxi. 31.

In order to understand this part of the parable, it must be observed, that among the ancients, especially in the east, every one that came to a marriage feast was expected to appear in a handsome and elegant dress, which was called the WEDDING GARMENT. This was frequently a white robe; and where the guest was a *stranger*, or was not able to provide such a robe, it was usual for the master of the feast to furnish him with one; and if he who gave the entertainment was of high rank and great opulence, he sometimes provided marriage robes for the whole assembly. To this custom we have allusions in Homer, and other classic writers*; and there are some traces of it in the entertainments of the Turkish court at this very day†. It must be remarked also, that it was in a very high degree indecorous and offensive to good manners, to intrude into the festivity without this garment; hence the indignation of the king against the bold intruder who dared to appear at the marriage feast without the nuptial garment. "He was cast into outer darkness;" he was driven away from the blaze and splendor of the gay apartments within, to the darkness and gloom of the street, where he was left to unavailing grief and remorse for the offence he had committed, and the enjoyments he had lost.

This man was meant to be the representative of those presumptuous persons who intrude themselves into the Christian covenant, and expect to receive all the privileges and all the rewards annexed to it, without possessing any one of those Christian graces and virtues which the Gospel requires from all those who profess to believe and to embrace it. Nothing is more common in Scripture than to represent the *habits* and *dispositions* of the mind, those which determine and distinguish the whole character, under the figure of bodily garments and external habits. Thus Job says of himself, "I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my judgment was as a cloak and a diadem‡." And again in Isaiah it is said, "He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation; he hath covered me with a robe

* Odyss. viii. 402. Diod. Sic. l. xiii. p. 375. 376.

† At the entertainment given by the grand vizier to Lord Elgin and his suite, in the palace of the seraglio, pelisses were given to all the guests.

‡ Job xxix. 14.

of righteouſneſs, as a bridegroom decketh himſelf with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herſelf with jewels*." In the ſame manner we are commanded in the Goſpel to *put on* charity, to *be clothed* with humility: and in the book of Revelation†, the elders are deſcribed as ſitting before the throne of God clothed in *white raiment*. And in the nineteenth chapter there is a paſſage, which is a clear and beautiful illuſtration of that now before us. "The marriage of the Lamb is come; and to her (*that is* to the church) was granted, that ſhe ſhould be arrayed *in* fine linen, clean and white; and this fine linen, we are expreſsly told, is the *righteouſneſs of ſaints*. "And he ſaith unto me, Write, bleſſed are they which are called to the *marriage ſupper of the Lamb*; that is Chriſt the king‡." This is a plain alluſion to the parable before us; and moſt evidently ſhows, that the man without the wedding garment is every man that is not clothed with *the robe of righteouſneſs*; every man that pretends to be a Chriſtian, without poſſeſſing the true evangelical temper and diſpoſition of mind, without the virtues of a holy life; every one that expects to be ſaved by Chriſt, yet regards not the conditions on which that ſalvation depends; every profane, every unjuſt, every diſſolute man; every one, in ſhort, that preſumes to ſay, "Lord, Lord, yet doeth not the will of his father which is in Heaven‖." All theſe ſhall be excluded from the marriage feaſt, from the privileges of the Goſpel, and the joys of heaven, and ſhall be caſt into outer darkneſs, there ſhall be weeping and gnaſhing of teeth; for many, we are told, are called, but few are choſen; that is, many are *called upon* and *invited* to embrace the Goſpel; but few, comparatively ſpeaking, receive it, or at leaſt conduct themſelves in a manner ſuitable to their high and heavenly calling, ſo as to be *choſen* or deemed worthy to inherit the kingdom of heaven.

I have only to obſerve further on this parable, that although in its primary intention it relates ſolely to the Jews, yet it has, like many other of our Lord's parables, a ſecondary reference to perſons of every denomination in every age and nation, who, through indolence, prejudice,

* Iſa. lxi. 10. † Ch. iv. 4.
‡ Rev. xix. 7, 8, 9. ‖ Matth. vii. 21.

vanity, pride, or vice, reject the Chriſtian revelation; or who, profeſſing to receive it, live in direct oppoſition to its doctrines and its precepts. The ſame future puniſhment which is denounced againſt the unbelieving or hypocritical Jews, will be with equal ſeverity inflicted on *them*.

After Jeſus had delivered this parable, the Phariſees perceiving plainly that it was directed againſt them principally, were highly incenſed, and determined to take their revenge, and endeavor to bring him into difficulty and danger by enſnaring queſtions. "Then went the Phariſees and took counſel how they might entangle him in his talk. And they ſent out unto him their diſciples, with the Herodians, ſaying, Maſter, we know that thou art true, and teacheſt the way of God in truth; neither careſt thou for any man, for thou regardeſt not the perſon of men. Tell us therefore, what thinkeſt thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæſar, or not? But Jeſus perceived their wickedneſs, and ſaid, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? Show me the tribute-money; and they brought unto him a penny. And he ſaith unto them, whoſe is this image and ſuperſcription? They ſay unto him, Cæſar's. Then ſaith he unto them, Render therefore unto Cæſar the things that are Cæſar's, and unto God the things that are God's. When they heard theſe words, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way." In order to underſtand the inſidious nature of the queſtion here propoſed to Jeſus, it muſt be obſerved, that the Jews were at this time, as they had been for many years, under the dominion of the Romans; and as an acknowledgment of their ſubjection, paid them an annual tribute in money. The Phariſees however were adverſe to the payment of this tribute; and contended, that being the peculiar people of God, and he their only rightful ſovereign, they ought not to pay tribute to any foreign prince whatever: they conſidered themſelves as ſubjects of the Almighty, and releaſed from all obedience to any foreign power. There were many others who maintained a contrary opinion, and it was a queſtion much agitated among different parties. Who the Herodians were that accompanied the Phariſees, and what their ſentiments were on this ſubject, is very doubtful: nor is it a matter of any moment. It

is plain from their name that they were in some way or other attached to Herod; and as he was a friend to the Roman government, they probably maintained the propriety of paying the tribute.

In this state of things both the Pharisees and Herodians came to Jesus, and after some flattering and hypocritical compliments to his love of truth, his intrepidity, impartiality, and disregard to power and greatness (calculated evidently to spirit him up to some bold and offensive declaration of his opinion) they put this question to him: "Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar, or not?" They were persuaded, that in answering this question, he must either render himself odious to the Jewish people, by opposing their popular notions of liberty, and appearing to pay court to the emperor; or, on the other hand, give offence to that prince, and expose himself to the charge of sedition and disaffection to the Roman government, by denying their right to the tribute they had imposed. They conceived it impossible for him to extricate himself from this dilemma, or to escape danger on one side or the other; and perhaps no other person but himself could have eluded the snare that was laid for him. But he *did it* completely: and showed on this occasion, as he had done on many others, that presence of mind and readiness of reply to difficult and unexpected questions, which is one of the strongest proofs of superior wisdom, of a quick discernment, and a prompt decision. He pursued, in short, the method which he had adopted in similar instances; he compelled the Jews in effect to answer the question themselves, and to take from him all the odium attending the determination of it. He perceived their wickedness, and said, "Why tempt ye me? Why do you try to ensnare me, ye hypocrites? Shew me the tribute-money. And they brought unto him a penny (a small silver coin of the Romans, called a denarius.) And he said unto them, whose is this image and superscription? And they say unto him, Cæsar's." By admitting that this was Cæsar's

* These whom St. Mark calls the *Leaven of Herod*, c. viii. 15. St. Matthew in the parallel passage, xvi. 5. calls Sadducees. Hence, perhaps, we may infer, that the Herodians and the Sadducees were the same persons.

coin, and by conſenting to receive it as the current coin of their country, they in fact acknowledged their ſubjection to his government. For the right of coinage, and of iſſuing the coin, and giving value and currency to it, is one of the higheſt prerogatives, and moſt deciſive marks of ſovereignty; and it was a tradition of their own rabbins, that to admit the impreſſion and the inſcription of any prince on their current coin, was an acknowledgment of their ſubjection to him. And it was more particularly ſo in the preſent inſtance, becauſe we are told that the denarius paid by the Jews as tribute-money had an inſcription round the head of Cæſar, to this effect; *Cæſar Auguſtus, Judæa being ſubdued*[*]. To pay this coin with this inſcription, was the compleateſt acknowledgment of ſubjection, and of courſe of their obligation to pay the tribute demanded of them, that could be imagined. Our Lord's deciſion therefore was a neceſſary conſequence of their own conceſſion. "Render therefore unto Cæſar the things which are Cæſar's, (which you yourſelves acknowledge to be Cæſar's,) and unto God the things that are God's." And when they heard theſe words, they marvelled; they were aſtoniſhed at his prudence and addreſs; and left him, and went their way.

But in this anſwer of our Saviour is contained a much ſtronger proof of his conſummate wiſdom and diſcretion than has yet been mentioned. He not only diſengaged himſelf from the difficulties in which the queſtion was meant to involve him, but without entering into any political diſcuſſions, he laid down two doctrines of the very laſt importance to the peace and happineſs of mankind, and the ſtability of civil government. He made a clear diſtinction between the duties we owe to God and the duties we owe to our earthly rulers. He ſhowed that they did not, in the ſmalleſt degree, interfere or claſh with each other; and that we ought never to refuſe what is juſtly due to Cæſar, under pretence of its being inconſiſtent with what we owe to our Maker

On the contrary, he lays down this as a general fundamental rule of his religion, that we ought to pay obedi-

[*] See Hammond in loc.

ence to LAWFUL AUTHORITY, and ſubmit to that acknowledged and eſtabliſhed government under which we live. The Jews had for a hundred years acknowledged their ſubjection, and paid their tribute to the Roman government; and our Lord's deciſion therefore was, "Render unto Cæſar the things that are Cæſar's." It is true that the tyrant Tiberius was then emperor of Rome, but the Jews alledged no particular grievance or act of oppreſſion to juſtify their refuſal of tribute; and our Lord had no concern with any peculiar form of government. His deciſion would have been the ſame, had the Roman republic then exiſted. His doctrine was obedience to lawful authority, in whatever ſhape that authority might be exerciſed. If it be contented that there may be extraordinary caſes of extreme and intolerable tyranny, which burſt aſunder at once the bonds of civil ſubordination, and juſtify reſiſtance; the anſwer is, that theſe were conſiderations into which the divine founder of our religion did not think it wiſe or expedient to enter. He left them to be decided (as they always muſt be) at the moment, by the preſſing exigencies and peculiar circumſtances of the caſe, operating on the common feelings and common ſenſe of mankind. His great object was to lay down one broad fundamental rule, which, conſidered as a general and leading principle, would be moſt conducive to the peace, the comfort, and the ſecurity of mankind; and that rule moſt indiſputably is the very doctrine which he inculcated; OBEDIENCE TO LAWFUL AUTHORITY AND ESTABLISHED GOVERNMENT. In perfect conformity to his ſentiments, the apoſtles held the ſame language after his death. "Submit yourſelves, ſays St. Peter, to every ordinance of man, for the Lord's ſake; whether it be unto the king as ſupreme, or unto governors, as unto them that are ſent by him, for the puniſhment of evil doers, and the praiſe of them that do well*." "Be ſubject to principalities and powers, ſays St. Paul, and *obey magiſtrates*†. Ye muſt needs be ſubject not only for wrath, but alſo for conſcience ſake‡. Render therefore to all their dues, tribute to whom tribute is due, cuſtom to whom cuſtom, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor‖."

* 1 Peter, ii. 13—14.
† Tit. iii. 1.
‡ Rom. xiii. 5.
‖ Rom. xiii. 7.

Here then we see the whole weight of the Gospel, and of its divine Author, thrown into the scale of lawful authority. Here we see that the Christian religion comes in as a most powerful auxiliary to the civil magistrate, and lends the entire force of its sanctions to the established government of every country; an advantage of infinite importance to the peace and welfare of society. And happy had it been for mankind, if in this, as in every other instance, they had conformed to the directions of the Gospel, instead of indulging their own wild projects and destructive theories of resistance to civil government, and the subversion of the most ancient and venerable institutions. Happy had it been for the Jews in particular, if they had adopted our Saviour's advice; for by acting contrary to it, by breaking out as they did soon after into open rebellion against the Romans, they plunged themselves into a most cruel and sanguinary war, which ended in the entire overthrow of their city, their temple, and their government, and the destruction of vast multitudes of the people themselves. Similar calamities, have, we know, in other countries, arisen from similar causes; from a contempt of all legitimate authority, and a direct opposition to those sage and salutary precepts of the Gospel, which are no less calculated to preserve the peace, tranquility, security, and good order of civil society, than to promote the individual happiness of every human being, here and for ever.

The Pharisees having been thus completely foiled in their attempt to ensnare and entangle our Saviour in his talk, the next attempt made upon him was by a different set of men, the Sadducees, who disbelieved a resurrection, a future state, and the existence of the soul after death. And their object was to shew the absurdity and the falsehood of these doctrines, by stating a difficulty respecting them, which they conceived to be insuperable. The difficulty was this: "The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him, saying, Master, Moses said, if a man die having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, de-

ceaſed, and having no iſſue, left his wife unto his brother: likewiſe the ſecond alſo, and the third, unto the ſeventh: and laſt of all the woman died alſo: therefore in the reſurrection, whoſe wife ſhall ſhe be of the ſeven? for they all had her. Jeſus anſwered and ſaid unto them, ye do err, not knowing the ſcriptures nor the power of God; for in the reſurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels in heaven. But as touching the reſurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was ſpoken unto you by God, ſaying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Iſaac, and the God of Jacob! God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."

This anſwer of our Saviour's has by ſome been thought to be obſcure, and not to go directly to the point of proving a reſurrection, which the Sadducees denied, and which their objection was meant to overthrow. In our Lord's reply, no argument ſeems to be advanced, nor any plain text of ſcripture produced to eſtabliſh the doctrine of a reſurrection of the body, and its re-animation by the ſoul. It is only contended, that as God declares himſelf to be the God of Abraham, Iſaac, and Jacob, the ſouls of thoſe perſons muſt ſtill be in exiſtence in a ſeparate ſtate; becauſe God could not be ſaid to be the God of thoſe who were no longer in being. This is undeniable. But how (it is ſaid) does this prove a reſurrection? To explain this, it muſt be obſerved, that Chriſt's anſwer conſiſts of two parts: in the firſt, he ſolves the difficulty ſtarted by the Sadducees reſpecting a reſurrection, by telling them that it aroſe entirely from their not attending to the power of God, which could effect with the utmoſt eaſe what to them appeared impoſſible; and from their ignorance of the ſtate of human beings in heaven, which reſembled that of angels, and required not a conſtant ſucceſſion to be kept up by marriage. The caſe therefore they had ſtated reſpecting the marriage of the ſeven brethren with one woman was a very unfortunate one, becauſe it happened that in heaven there would be no ſuch thing as marriage; which deſtroyed at once the whole of that objection which they deemed ſo formidable. In the ſecond part he completely ſubverts the falſe principle on which their diſbelief of a

resurrection and a future state was entirely founded. This principle was, that the soul had no separate existence, but fell into nothing at the dissolution of its union with the body. This we learn from the Acts of the Apostles*, where it is said, "that the Sadducees believe neither angel nor spirit:" and from Josephus, who tells us, that the Sadducees held that the soul *vanishes* (as he expresses it) with the body, and rejected the doctrine of its duration after death†. It was this principle therefore, which our Saviour undertook to overthrow, which he does effectually in the 31st and 32d verses, by shewing it to be a clear inference from the words of scripture‡, that although the bodies of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had long been in their graves, yet their souls had survived, and were at that moment in existence. From hence it necessarily followed that the soul did not perish with the body, as the Sadducees believed, but that it continued in being after death; and at the general resurrection would be again united with the body, and live for ever in a future state of happiness or of misery.

But though arguments may be confuted, and absurdities exposed, the thorough-paced caviller is not easily silenced. One should have thought that the disgraceful failure of so many attempts to surprize and ensnare Jesus, would have taught his adversaries a little modesty and a little prudence: but these are qualities with which professed disputers and sophists do not usually much abound. When therefore, the Pharisees had heard that Jesus had put the Sadducees to silence, instead of being discouraged from making any more experiments of that nature, *they were gathered together*, probably to consult how they might renew their attacks upon him with more success. Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it,

* Chap. xxiii. 8.

† *Sunaphanizei tois tōnasi.* Antiq. l. xviii. c. 2, p. 793. Ed. Huds.

‡ Ex. iii. 6.

thou ſhalt love thy neighbor as thyſelf. On theſe two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

The queſtion here propoſed to Jeſus by the lawyer, or interpreter of the Moſaic law, took its riſe probably from a maxim which ſeems to have been received among the Scribes and Phariſees as a firſt principle, namely, that ſuch a multiplicity of precepts as the law contained was too great for any one to obſerve; and *therefore* all that could be required was, that each ſhould ſelect *to himſelf* one or two great and important duties, on account of which, if inviolably obſerved, his tranſgreſſions in other reſpects would be overlooked. But then immediately aroſe a queſtion, which *were* theſe great and important duties that ought to have the preference to all the reſt, and on which they might ſecurely ground all their merit and all their pretences to the favor of God. And on this queſtion a variety of ſects were formed, under their reſpective leaders, who diſputed about the *chief duty* much in the ſame manner as the ancient pagan philoſophers did about the *chief good*; and exactly with the ſame benefit to themſelves and to the world.

It was with a reference therefore to theſe diſputes, which were ſo warmly agitated among the Phariſees, that the lawyer aſked our Lord, "which was the great commandment of the law?" Our Saviour's anſwer was, "thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy ſoul, and with all thy mind. This is the *firſt* and great commandment." He decided therefore immediately in favor of the moral law, and yet with his uſual prudence did not neglect the ceremonial; for this very commandment of *the love of God* was written upon their phylacteries.

This then being declared by our Saviour himſelf to be the *firſt* of the commandments, muſt be conſidered by every Chriſtian as ſtanding at the head of that evangelical code of laws which he is bound to obey, and as entitled therefore to his firſt and higheſt regard. He is to love the Lord his God "with all his heart, with all his ſoul, and with all his mind:" and the chief teſt by which the Goſ-

pel orders us to try and measure our love to God is, the regard we pay to his commands. "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, says our Lord, he it is that loveth me*." St. John in still stronger terms, assures us, that "whoso keepeth God's word, in him verily is the love of God *perfected*†." The love of our Maker then is neither a mere unmeaning animal fervor, nor a lifeless formal worship or obedience. It consists in devoutness of heart as well as purity of life; and from comparing together the different passages of Scripture relating to it, we may define it to be such a reverential admiration of God's perfections in general, and such a grateful sense of his infinite goodness in particular, as render the contemplation and the worship of him delightful to us, and produce in us a constant desire and endeavor to please him in every part of our moral and religious conduct.

This is, in a few words, what the scriptures mean by the love of God, and what our Lord here calls the FIRST AND GREAT COMMANDMENT. It is justly so called for various reasons: because he who is the object of it is the first and greatest of all beings, and therefore the duties owing to him must have the precedence and pre-eminence over every other; because it is the grand leading principle of right conduct, the original source and fountain from which all Christian graces flow, from whence the living waters of religion take their rise, and branch out into all the various duties of human life; because, in fine, it is, when fervent and sincere, the grand mainspring of human conduct; the only motive sufficiently powerful to subdue our strongest passions, to carry us triumphantly through the severest trials, and render us superior to the most formidable temptations.

Next to this in order and in excellence, or, as our Saviour expresses it, *like* unto it, is, that other divine command, "thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

By the word neighbor is here to be understood, every man with whom we have any concern; every one who stands in need of our kindness, and to whom we are able

* John. xiv. 21. † 1 John, ii. 5.

to extend it; which includes not only our relations, friends, and countrymen, but even our enemies; as appears from the parable of the good Samaritan. The precept therefore requires us *generally* to love our fellow-creatures as we do ourſelves.

To this it has been objected that the precept is impracticable and impoſſible. Self-love, it is contended, is a paſſion implanted in our breaſts by the *hand of* God himſelf; and though ſocial love is alſo another affection which he has given us, yet there is no compariſon between the ſtrength of the two principles; and no man can or does love all mankind as well as he does himſelf. It is perfectly true; nor does the precept before us require it. The words are not thou ſhalt love thy neighbor as *much as thyſelf*, but thou ſhalt love thy neighbor *as* thyſelf; that is, thou ſhalt entertain for him an affection ſimilar in *kind*, though not equal in *degree*, to that which thou entertaineſt for thyſelf. Our ſelf-love prompts us to ſeek our own happineſs, as far as is conſiſtent with the duties we owe to God and to man. Our ſocial love ſhould in the ſame manner prompt us to ſeek the happineſs of our neighbor, as far as is conſiſtent with the duty we owe to God and ourſelves. But in all *equal* circumſtances, our love for ourſelves muſt have a priority in *degree* to the love we have for our neighbor. If, for inſtance, my neighbor is in extreme want of food, and I am in the ſame want, I am not bound to give him that food which is indiſpenſably neceſſary for my own preſervation, but that only which is conſiſtent with it. The rule in ſhort can never be miſtaken by any man of common ſenſe. Our buſineſs is to take care to carry it far enough: nature will take ſufficient care that we do not carry it too far. It is in fact nothing more than what we are taught by another divine rule very nearly allied to this, and which all men allow to be reaſonable, equitable and practicable; "whatſoever ye would that men ſhould do unto you, do ye even ſo unto them*."

This is preciſely what is meant by loving our neighbor as ourſelves; for when we treat him exactly as we would expect and hope to be treated by him in the ſame circum-

* Matth. vii. 12.

fluences, we give a clear and decisive proof that we love him *as* ourselves. And in this there is evidently no impossibility, no difficulty, no obscurity.

These then are the two great commandments, on which we are told *hang all the law and the prophets*; that is, on them, as on its main foundation, rests the whole Mosaic dispensation; for of *that*, not of the Gospel, our Lord is here speaking. To explain, establish, and confirm these two leading principles of human duty, was one of the chief objects of the law and the prophets. But it must at the same time be remembered (as I have shewn at large in a former lecture*) that great and important as these two precepts confessedly are, they do by no means constitute the whole of the *Christian system*. In that we find many essential improvements of the moral law, which was carried by our Saviour to a much higher degree of perfection than in the Jewish dispensation, as may be seen more particularly in his sermon on the mount. We find also in the New Testament all those important evangelical doctrines which distinguish the Christian revelation; more particularly those of a resurrection; of a future day of retribution, of the expiation of our sins, original and personal, by the sacrifice of Christ, of sanctification by the Holy Spirit, of justification by a true and lively faith in the merits of our Redeemer. If therefore we wish to form a just and correct idea of the whole Christian dispensation, and if we wish to be considered as genuine disciples of our divine Master, we must not content ourselves with observing only the two leading commandments of love to God and love to men, but we must look to the *whole* of our religion as it lies in the Gospel; we must endeavor to stand perfect in *all* the will of God, and in *all* the doctrines of his Son, as declared in the Christian revelation; and after doing our utmost to fulfil all righteousness, and to attend to every branch of our duty, both with respect to God, our neighbor, and ourselves, we must finally repose all our hopes of salvation on the merits of our Redeemer, and on our belief in him as the way, the truth, and the life.

* Lect. vii. p. 190.

I must now put a period to these Lectures for the present season; and if it should please God to preserve my life for another year, I hope to finish my observations on the gospel of St. Matthew; beyond which I must not now extend my views.

In the mean while, from what I have observed in the progress of these Lectures, I cannot help indulging a humble hope that they have not been unattended with some salutary effects upon your minds. But when, on the other hand, I consider that the time of year is now approaching, in which the gaities and amusements of this vast metropolis are generally engaged in with incredible alacrity and ardour, and multitudes are pouring in from every part of the kingdom to take their share in them; and when I recollect further, that at this very period in the last year a degree of extravagance and wildness in pleasure took place, which gave pain to every serious mind, and was almost unexampled in any former times; I am not, I confess, without some apprehensions, that the same scene of levity and dissipation may again recur; and that some of those who now hear me (of the younger part more especially) may be drawn too far into this fashionable vortex, and loose in that giddy tumult of diversion all remembrance of what has passed in this sacred place. I must therefore most earnestly caution them against these fascinating allurements, and recommend to them that moderation, that temperance, that modesty in amusements, which their Christian profession at all times requires; but for which at this moment there are reasons of peculiar weight and force*.

To indulge ourselves in endless gaieties and expensive luxuries, at a time when so many of our poorer brethren are, from the heavy pressure of unfavourable circumstances, in want of the most essential necessaries of life, would surely manifest a very unfeeling and unchristian disposition in ourselves, and would be a most cruel and wanton aggravation of their sufferings.

* This Lecture was given in April 1800, a time of great scarcity and extreme dearness of all the necessaries of life.

It is true indeed that their wants have hitherto been relieved with a liberality and kindneſs, which reflect the higheſt honor on thoſe who exerciſed them. But the evil in queſtion ſtill ſubſiſts in its full force, and is, I fear, more likely to increaſe than to abate for months to come, and will of courſe require unceaſing exertions of benevolence and repeated acts of charity on our part, to alleviate and mitigate its baneful effects.

Every one ought therefore to provide as ample a fund as poſſible for this purpoſe; and how can this be better provided than by a retrenchment of our expenſive diverſions, our ſplended aſſemblies, and luxurious entertainments? We are not *now* required, as the young ruler in the Goſpel was, to ſell all we have and give to the poor; but we *are* required, eſpecially in times ſuch as theſe, to cut off all idle and needleſs articles of profuſion, that we "may have to give to him that needeth."

And when we conſider that the expence of a ſingle evening's amuſement, or a ſingle convivial meeting, would give ſupport and comfort perhaps to twenty wretched families, pining in hunger, in ſickneſs, and in ſorrow, can we ſo far diveſt ourſelves of all the tender feelings of our nature (not to mention any higher principle), can we be ſo intolerably ſelfiſh, ſo weded to pleaſure, ſo devoted to our own gratification, as to let the loweſt of our brethren periſh, while we are ſolacing ourſelves with every earthly delight? No one that gives himſelf leaf to reflect for a moment can think this to be right, can maintain it to be conſiſtent with his duty either to God or man. And, even in reſpect to the very object we ſo eagerly purſue, and are ſo anxious to obtain, in point even of pleaſure, I mean, and ſelf-gratification, I doubt much whether the giddieſt votary of amuſement can receive half the real ſatisfaction from the gayeſt ſcenes of diſſipation he is immerſed in, that he would experience (if he would but try) from reſcuing a fellow-creature from deſtruction, and lighting up an afflicted and fallen countenance with joy.

Let us then abridge ourſelves of a few indulgences, and give the price of what they would coſt us to thoſe who

have none. By this laudable ſpecies of œconomy, we ſhall at once improve ourſelves in a habit of ſelf-denial and ſelf-government; we ſhall demonſtrate the ſincerity of our love to our fellow-creatures, by giving up *ſomething* that is dear to us for their ſake, by ſacrificing our pleaſures to their neceſſities; and above all we ſhall approve ourſelves as faithful ſervants in the ſight of our Almighty Sovereign; we ſhall give ſome proof of our gratitude to our Heavenly Benefactor and Friend, who has given us richly all things to enjoy; and who, in return for that bounty, expects and commands us to be rich in good works, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to comfort the ſick, to viſit the fatherleſs and widow in their affliction, and to keep ourſelves unſpotted from the world, unpolluted by its vices, and unſubdued by its predominant vanities and follies.

LECTURE XIX.

MATTHEW xxiv.

THIS courſe of Lectures for the preſent year will begin with the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew; which contains one of the cleareſt and moſt important prophecies that is to be found in the ſacred writings.

The prophecy is that which our bleſſed Lord delivered reſpecting the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, to which, I apprehend, the whole of the chapter, in its *primary* acceptation, relates. At the ſame time it muſt be admitted, that the forms of expreſſion, and the images made uſe of, are for the moſt part applicable alſo to the day of judgment; and that an alluſion to that great event, as a kind of ſecondary object, runs through almoſt every part of the prophecy. This is a very common practice in the prophetic writings, where two ſubjects are frequently carried on together, a principal and a ſubordinate one. In Iſaiah there are no leſs than three ſubjects, the reſtoration of the Jews from the Babyloniſh captivity, the call of the Gentiles to the Chriſtian covenant, and the redemption of mankind by the Meſſiah, which are frequently adumbrated under the ſame figures and images, and are ſo blended and interwoven together, that it is extremely difficult to ſeparate them from each other*. In the ſame manner our Saviour, in the chapter before us, ſeems to hold out the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, which is his principal ſubject, as a type of the diſſolution of the world, which is the under-part of the repreſentation. By thus judiciouſly mingling together theſe two important cataſtrophes, he gives at the ſame time (as he does in many other inſtances) a moſt intereſting admonition to his immediate hearers the Jews, and a moſt awful leſſon to all his future diſciples; and the

* Biſhop Lowth on Iſaiah. lii. 13.

benefit of his predictions, inſtead of being confined to one occaſion, or to one people, is by this admirable management extended to every ſubſequent period of time, and to the whole Chriſtian world.

After this general remark, which is a ſort of key to the whole prophecy, and will afford an eaſy ſolution to ſeveral difficulties that occur in it, I ſhall proceed to conſider diſtinctly the moſt material parts of it.

We are told in the firſt verſe of this chapter, that "on our Saviour's departing from the temple his diſciples came to him, to ſhew him the buildings of it;" that is, to draw his attention to the magnitude, the ſplendour, the apparent ſolidity and ſtability of that magnificent ſtructure. It is obſervable that they advert particularly to the *ſtones* of which it was compoſed. In St. Mark their expreſſion is, "See what manner of *ſtones*, and what buildings are here;" and in St. Luke they ſpeak of the *goodly ſtones and gifts* with which it was adorned. This ſeems at the firſt view a circumſtance of little importance; but it ſhows in a very ſtrong light with what perfect fidelity and minute accuracy every thing is diſcribed in the ſacred writings. For it appears from the hiſtorian Joſephus, that there was ſcarce any thing more remarkable in this celebrated temple than the ſtupendous ſize of the ſtones with which it was conſtructed. Thoſe employed in the foundations were forty cubits, that is above ſixty feet, in length; and the ſuperſtructure, as the ſame hiſtorian obſerves, was worthy of ſuch foundations, for there were ſtones in it of the whiteſt marble, upwards of ſixty-ſeven feet long, more than ſeven feet high, and nine broad*.

It was therefore not without reaſon that the diſciples particularly noticed the uncommon magnitude of the ſtones of this ſuperb temple, from which, and from the general ſolidity and ſtrength of the building, they probably flattered themſelves, and meant to inſinuate to their divine Maſter, that this unrivalled edifice was built for eternity, was formed to ſtand the ſhock of ages, and to reſiſt the utmoſt efforts of human power to deſtroy it. How aſtoniſhed

* Joſephus de Bell. Jud. l. x. c. 5.

then and dismayed must they have been at our Saviour's answer to these triumphant observations of theirs! Jesus said unto them, "See ye not all those things? Verily I say unto you, there shall not be left here one *stone* upon another that shall not be thrown down." This is a proverbial expression, used on other occasions to denote *entire destruction*; and therefore had the temple been reduced to ruins in the usual way, the prophecy would have been fully accomplished. But it so happened that this prediction was almost *literally* fulfilled, and that in reality scarce one stone was left upon another. For when the Romans had taken Jerusalem, Titus ordered his soldiers to dig up the foundations both of the city and the temple*. The Jewish writers also themselves acknowledge, that Terentius Rufus, who was left to command the army, did with a plough-share tear up the foundations of the temple†; and thereby fulfilled that prophecy of Micah‡. "Therefore shall Zion for your sake be ploughed as a field." And in confirmation of this remarkable circumstance, Eusebius also assures us, that the temple was ploughed up by the Romans; and that he himself saw it lying in ruins§. The evangelist next informs us, that as Jesus sat on the mount of Olives, which was exactly opposite to the hill on which the temple was built, and commanded a very fine view of it from the east, his disciples came unto him privately, saying, "Tell us when shall these things be, and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world." The expressions here made use of, *the sign of thy coming*, and *the end of the world*, at the first view naturally lead our thoughts to the coming of Christ at the day of judgment, and the final dissolution of this earthly globe. But a few attention to the parallel passages in St. Mark and St. Luke, and a critical examination into the real import of those two phrases in various parts of Scripture, will soon convince a careful inquirer, that by *the coming of Christ* is here meant, not his coming to judge the world at the last day, but his coming to execute judgment upon Jerusalem¶; and that by *the end of the world* is to

* Jos. de Bello Jud. l. vii. c. i. p. 170. B.
† See Whitby in Loc.
‡ Chap. iii. 12.
§ Euseb. Dem. Evang. l. vi. 13.
¶ See Mark xiii. 4. Luke xxi. 7. Matth. xxiv. 4, 5; xvi. 28. John xxi 22.

be underſtood, not the final conſummation of all things here below, but the end of *that age*, the end of the Jewiſh ſtate and polity; the ſubverſion of their city, temple, and government*.

The real queſtions therefore here put to our Lord by the diſciples were theſe two:

1ſt. At what time the deſtruction of Jeruſalem was to take place: "Tell us, when ſhall theſe things be?"

2dly. What the ſigns were that were to precede it: "What ſhall be the ſign of thy coming?"

Our Lord in his anſwer begins firſt with the *ſigns*, of which he treats from the 4th to the 31ſt verſe, inclusive.

The firſt of theſe *ſigns* is ſpecified in the 5th verſe, "Many ſhall come in my name, ſaying, I am Chriſt, and ſhall deceive many."

This part of the prophecy began ſoon to be *fulfilled*; for we learn from the ancient writers, and particularly from Joſephus, that not long after our Lord's aſcenſion ſeveral impoſtors appeared, ſome pretending to be the Meſſiah, and others to foretel future events. The firſt were thoſe whom our Lord here ſays *ſhould come in his name*, and were therefore *falſe Chriſts*. The others are alluded to in the eleventh verſe, under the name of *falſe prophets*: "Many falſe prophets ſhall ariſe, and ſhall deceive many." Of the firſt ſort were, as Origen informs us†, one Doſitheus, who ſaid that he was the Chriſt foretold by Moſes; and Simon Magus, who ſaid he appeard among the Jews as the Son of God. Beſides ſeveral others alluded to by Joſephus‡.

The ſame hiſtorian tells us, that there were many *falſe prophets*, particularly an Egyptian, who collected together

* The word *aiōn* (here tranſlated the world) frequently means nothing more than *an age*, a certain definite period of time. See Matth. xxiv. 6. 14. Mark xiii. 7. Luke xxi. 9, compared with ver. 20. Hebrews ix. 26.

† Origen: Adv. Cels. l. 1 and 6.

‡ De Bell. Jud. l. 1. p. 705.

above thirty thousand Jews, whom he had deceived*, and Theudas a magician, who said he was a prophet, and deceived many; and a multitude of others, who deluded the people even to the last, with a promise of help from God. And in the reign of Nero, when Felix was procurator of Judæa, such a number of these impostors made their appearance, that many of them were seized and put to death every day†.

The next signs pointed out by our Lord are these that follow. "Ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars; see that ye be not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet: for nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be famines and pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places: all these are the beginning of sorrows."

That there were in reality great disturbances and commotions in those times, that there were not only rumours of wars, but wars actually existing, and continued dissentions, insurrections, and massacres among the Jews, and other nations who dwelt in the same cities with them, is so fully attested by all the historians of that period, but more particularly by Josephus, that to produce all the dreadful events of that kind which he enumerates, would be to transcribe a great part of his history. It is equally certain, from the testimony of the same author, as well as from Eusebius, and several profane historians, that there were famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places. It is added in the parallel place by St. Luke‡, "that fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven." And accordingly Josephus, in the preface to his history of the Jewish war, and in the history itself, enumerates a great variety of astonishing signs and prodigies, which he says preceded the calamities that impended over the Jews, and which he expressly affirms, in perfect conformity to our Saviour's prediction, were signs manifestly intended to forebode their approaching destruction§. And these

* Jos. Antiq. l. 20. c. 6. and c. 4. s. 1. Ed. Huds.
† Ib. c. 7. s. 5. p. 892. ‡ Luke xxi. 11.
§ Jos. Præm. sect. 11. p. 957. De Bell. Jud. l. vi. c. 5. s. 3. p. 1281-82. & l. 7. c. 30.

accounts are confirmed by the Roman hiſtorian Tacitus, who ſays that many prodigies happened at that time; armies appeared to be engaging in the ſky, arms were ſeen glittering in the air, the temple was illuminated with *flames* iſſuing from the clouds, the doors of the temple ſuddenly burſt open, and a voice more than human was heard, "that the gods were departing;" and ſoon after a great motion, as if they *were* departing*.

The ſign next ſpecified by our Saviour in the ninth and the four following verſes, relates to the diſciples themſelves. "Then ſhall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and ſhall kill you, and ye ſhall be hated of all nations for my name's ſake." The parallel paſſages in St. Luke and St. Mark are ſtill ſtronger, and more particular. St. Mark ſays, they ſhall deliver you up to the councils; and in the ſynagogues ye ſhall be beaten; and ye ſhall be brought before rulers and kings for my ſake, for a teſtimony againſt them†." St. Luke's words are, "They ſhall lay their hands on you, and perſecute you, delivering you up to the ſynagogues, and into priſons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's ſake‡." That every circumſtance here mentioned was minutely and exactly verified in the ſufferings of the apoſtles and diſciples after our Lord's deceaſe, muſt be perfectly well known to every one that has read the Acts of the Apoſtles. You will there ſee that the lives of the apoſtles were one continued ſcene of perſecution, affliction, and diſtreſs of every kind; that they were impriſoned, were beaten, were brought before councils, and ſanhedrims, and kings; were many of them put to death, and were hated of all nations, by the heathens as well as by the Jews, for the ſake of Chriſt; that is, for being called by his name. The very *name* of a Chriſtian was a crime; and it expoſed them to every ſpecies of inſult, indignity, and cruelty.

To all theſe calamities was to be added another, which we find in the tenth verſe. "Then ſhall many be offended, and ſhall betray one another, and ſhall hate one another." The meaning is, that many Chriſtians, terrified with theſe

* Tacitus, l. v. p. 25. Ed. Lips.
† Mark xiii. 9. ‡ Luke xxi. 12.

perſecutions, ſhall become apoſtates from their religion, and renounce their faith; for that is the meaning generally of the word *offend* in the New Teſtament. That this would ſometimes happen under ſuch trials and calamities as the firſt Chriſtians were expoſed to, we may eaſily believe, and St. Paul particularly mentions a few who turned away from him, and forſook him; namely, Phygellus, Hermogenes, and Demas*. The other circumſtance here predicted, "that the diſciples ſhould betray one another," is remarkably verified by the teſtimony of the Roman hiſtorian Tacitus, who, in diſcribing the perſecution under Nero, tells us, "that ſeveral Chriſtians were at firſt apprehended, and then, *by their diſcovery*, a multitude of others, were convicted, and cruelly put to death, with deriſion and inſult†.

It is a natural conſequence of all this, that the ardor of many in embracing and profeſſing Chriſtianity ſhould be conſiderably abated, or, as it is expreſſed in the twelfth verſe, *that the love of many ſhould wax cold*; and of this we find ſeveral inſtances mentioned by the ſacred writers‡.

"But he that ſhall endure unto the end (adds our Lord in the thirteenth verſe) the ſame ſhall be ſaved." He that ſhall not be diſmayed by theſe perſecutions, but ſhall continue firm in his faith and unſhaken in his duty to the laſt, ſhall be ſaved, both in this world and the next. It is, we know, the uniform doctrine of ſcripture, that they who perſevere in the belief and the practice of Chriſtianity to the end of their lives, ſhall, through the merits of their Redeemer, be rewarded with everlaſting life. And with reſpect to the preſent life, and the times to which our Saviour here alludes, it is remarkable, that none of his diſciples were known to periſh in the ſiege and deſtruction of Jeruſalem.

Another ſign which was to precede the demolition of the temple and the city of Jeruſalem was, that the Chriſtian religion was firſt to be propagated over the greater part of the Roman empire, which in ſcripture, as well as by the Roman writers, was called *the world*. "This goſ-

* 2 Tim. i. 15. iv. 10. † Tac. Ann. l. 15.
‡ 2 Tim. iv. 16. Heb x. 25.

pel of the kingdom ſhall be preached in all the world, for a witneſs unto all nations; and then ſhall the end come." Then ſhall come what is called in the third verſe the *end of the world*; that is, the *Jewiſh world*, the Jewiſh ſtate and government.

And accordingly St. Paul, in his Epiſtle to the Coloſſians, ſpeaks of the Goſpel "being come unto all the world, and preached to every creature under heaven*." And we learn from the moſt authentic writers, and the moſt ancient records, that the Goſpel was preached within thirty years after the death of Chriſt, in Idumæa, Syria, and Meſopotamia; in Media and Parthia, and many parts of Aſia Minor; in Egypt, Mauretania, Ethiopia, and other regions of affrica; in Greece and Italy; as far north as Scythia, and as far weſtward as Spain, and in this very iſland which we inhabit; where there is great reaſon to believe Chriſtianity was planted in the days of the apoſtles, and before the deſtruction of Jeruſalem. And this, it is ſaid, was to be "for a teſtimony againſt them;" that is, againſt the Jews; for a teſtimony that the offer of ſalvation was made to them in every part of the world where they were diſperſed; and that, by their obſtinate rejection of it, they had merited the ſingal puniſhment which ſoon after overtook them.

Our Lord then goes on to ſtill more alarming and more evident indications of the near approach of danger to the Jewiſh nation. "When ye therefore ſhall ſee the abomination of deſolation ſpoken of by Daniel the prophet†, ſtand in the holy place (let him that readeth underſtand); then let them that be in Judæa flee into the mountains." The meaning of this paſſage is clearly and fully explained by the parallel place in St. Luke: "when ye ſhall ſee Jeruſalem compaſſed with armies, then know that the deſolation thereof is nigh." The *abomination of deſolation* therefore denotes the Roman army which beſieged Jeruſalem, and which Daniel alſo, in the place alluded to, calls the *abomination which makes deſolate*.

* Col. i. 6. 23. † Chap. ix. 27.

The Roman army is here called an *abomination*, becauſe upon their ſtandards were depicted the images of their emperor and their tutelary gods, whom they worſhipped: and it is well known that idols were held by the Jews in the utmoſt abhorrence; and the very name they gave them was the expreſſion here made uſe of, *an abomination*. The word *deſolation* is added for an obvious reaſon, becauſe this mighty army brought ruin and deſolation upon Jeruſalem.

This city and the mountain on which it ſtood, and a circuit of ſeveral furlongs around it, were accounted holy ground; and as the Roman ſtandards were planted in the moſt conſpicuous places near the fortifications of the city, they are here ſaid to ſtand in *the holy place*, or, as St. Mark expreſſes it, "to ſtand where they ought not." And Joſephus tells us, that after the city was taken, "the Romans brought their enſigns into the temple, and placed one of them againſt the eaſtern gate, and ſacrificed to them there; which was the greateſt inſult and outrage that could poſſibly be offered to that wretched people*."

When therefore this deſolating abomination, this idolatrous and deſtructive army appeared before the holy city, "then, ſays our Lord, let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains; let him which is on the houſe top not come down to take any thing out of his houſe, neither let him that is in the fields return back to take his clothes." Theſe are allufions to Jewiſh cuſtoms, and are deſigned to impreſs upon the diſciples the neceſſity of immediate flight, not ſuffering themſelves to be delayed by turning back for any accommodations they might wiſh for. "And woe unto them that are with child, and to thoſe that give ſuck in thoſe days! And pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the ſabbath-day:" that is, unfortunate will be it for thoſe who, in ſuch a time of terror and diſtreſs, ſhall have any natural impediments to obſtruct their flight, and who are obliged to travel in the winter ſeaſon, when the weather is ſevere, the roads rough, and the days ſhort; or on the ſabbath-day, when the Jews fancied it unlawful to travel more than a mile or two. Theſe kind admoni-

* De Bell. Jud. l. vi. c. 6. ſ. 1 p. 1283.

tions were not loſt upon the diſciples. For we learn from the beſt eccleſiaſtical hiſtorians, that when the Roman armies approached to Jeruſalem, all the Chriſtians left that devoted city, and fled to Pella, a mountainous country, and to other places beyond the river Jordan. And Joſephus alſo informs us, that when Veſpaſian was drawing his forces towards Jeruſalem, a great multitude fled from Jericho into the *mountainous country* for their ſecurity*.

And happy was it for them that they *did ſo*, for the miſeries experienced by the Jews in that ſiege were almoſt without a parallel in the hiſtory of the world. "Then," ſays our Saviour, "ſhall be great tribulation, ſuch as was not from the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever ſhall be." This expreſſion is a proverbial one, frequently made uſe of by the ſacred writers to expreſs ſome very uncommon calamity†, and therefore it is not neceſſary to take the words in their ſtricteſt ſenſe. But yet in fact they were in the preſent inſtance almoſt literally fulfilled; and whoever will turn to the hiſtory of this war by Joſephus, and there read the detail of the horrible and almoſt incredible calamities endured by the inhabitants of Jeruſalem, during the ſiege, not only from the fire and ſword of the enemies without, but from famine and peſtilence, and continual maſſacres and murders from the fiend-like fury of the ſeditious zealots within, will be convinced, that the very ſtrong terms made uſe of by our Lord, even when literally interpreted, do not go beyond the truth. Indeed Joſephus himſelf, in his preface to his hiſtory, expreſſes himſelf almoſt in the very ſame words: "our city, ſays he, of all thoſe ſubjected to the Romans, was raiſed to the higheſt felicity, and was thruſt down again to the loweſt gulph of miſery; for if the misfortunes of all from the beginning of the world were compared with thoſe of the Jews, they would appear much inferior upon the compariſon‡." Is not this almoſt preciſely what our Saviour ſays, "there ſhall be great tribulation, ſuch as was not from the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever ſhall be." It is impoſſible

* De Bell. Jud. l. iv. c. 8. f. 2. p. 1193. Ed. Huds.
† Ex. x. 14. Joel. ii. 2. Dan. xii. 1. Maccab. ix. 27.
‡ De Bell. Jud. Proœmium, p. 955. Ed. Huds.

one would think, even for the moſt ſtubborn infidel, not to be ſtruck with the great ſimilarity of theſe two paſſages; and not to ſee that the prediction of our Lord, and the accompliſhment of it, as deſcribed by the hiſtorian, are exact counterparts of each other, and ſeem almoſt as if they had been written by the very ſame perſon. Yet Joſephus was not born till after our Saviour was crucified; and he was not a Chriſtian, but a Jew; and certainly never meant to give any teſtimony to the truth of our religion.

The calamities above mentioned were ſo ſevere, that had they been of long continuance the whole Jewiſh nation muſt have been deſtroyed; "except thoſe days ſhould be ſhortened, there ſhould no fleſh be ſaved, ſays Chriſt, in the 23d verſe; but (he adds) for the elect's ſake, thoſe days ſhall be ſhortened." They *were* ſhortened for the ſake of the elect, that is, of thoſe Jews who had been converted to Chriſtianity; and they were ſhortened by the beſieged themſelves, by their ſeditious and mutual ſlaughters, and their madneſs in burning their own proviſions.

"Then, continues Jeſus, if any man ſhall ſay unto you, Lo; here is Chriſt, or there, believe it not: for there ſhall ariſe falſe Chriſts and falſe prophets, and ſhall ſhew great ſigns and wonders, inſomuch that (if it were poſſible) they ſhall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore, if they ſhall ſay unto you he is in the deſert; go not forth: behold he is in the ſecret chambers: believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the eaſt and ſhineth even unto the the weſt, ſo ſhall the coming of the Son of man be. For wherefoever the carcaſe is, there ſhall the eagles be gathered together." Our Lord had already cautioned his diſciples againſt believing the falſe Chriſts and falſe prophets who would appear *before* the ſiege, and he now warns them againſt thoſe that would riſe up *during* the ſiege. This, Joſephus, tells us, they did in great abundance; and flattered the Jews with the hope of ſeeing their Meſſiah coming, with great power, to reſcue them from the hands of the Romans*. And they alſo pretended to

* Joſ. de Bell. Jud. l. vi. c. 5. ſ. 2. p. 1281. and Euſeb. Hiſt. Eccles. l. iv. c. 6.

shew signs and wonders; the very words made use of by the same historian, as well as by our Lord*. And it is remarkable that Christ here foretels, not only the appearance of these false prophets, but the very places to which they would lead their deluded followers; and these were, the "desert, and the secret chamber." And accordingly, if you look into the history of Josephus, you will find both these places distinctly specified as the theatres on which these impostors exhibited their delusions. For the historian relates a variety of instances in which these false Christs and false prophets betrayed their followers into the desert, where they were constantly destroyed; and he also mentions one of these pretenders, who declared to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, that God commanded them to go up into a particular part of the temple (into *the secret chamber*, as our Lord expresses it) and there they should receive the signs of deliverance. A multitude of men, women, and children went up accordingly; but, instead of deliverance, the place was set on fire by the Romans, and six thousand perished miserably in the flames, or by endeavouring to escape them.†

But the appearance of the true Christ was not to be in that way; it was to be as visible and as rapid as a flash of lightning: "for as the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." It shall not be in a remote desert or in a secret chamber of the temple, but shall be rendered conspicuous by the sudden and entire overthrow of Jerusalem, and its inhabitants.

"For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together."

By the carcase is meant the Jewish nation, which was morally and judicially dead; and the instruments of divine vengeance, that is the Roman armies, whose standards were eagles, would be collected together against the wicked people, as eagles are gathered together to devour their prey.

* Jos. Antiq. l. xx. c. 27. s. 6. p 983. Ed. Huds.
† Jos. Antiq. l. xx. c. 7. s. 6. and c. 7. s. 10. De Bell. Jud. l. ii. c. 13. s. 4. and l. vii. c. 11. s. 1. Ed. Huds.

In the three following verſes, the language of our divine Maſter becomes highly figurative and ſublime. "Immediately after the tribulation of thoſe days ſhall the ſun be darkened, and the moon ſhall not give her light, and the ſtars ſhall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens ſhall be ſhaken. And then ſhall appear the ſign of the Son of man in heaven: and then ſhall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they ſhall ſee the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he ſhall ſend his angels with a great ſound of a trumpet, and they ſhall gather his elect from the four winds from the one end of heaven to the other."*

Few people, I believe, read theſe verſes, without ſuppoſing that they refer entirely to the day of judgment, many of theſe expreſſions being actually applied to that great event in the very next chapter, and in other parts of ſcripture; and indeed ſeveral eminent men and learned commentators are of that opinion, and imagine that our Lord here makes a tranſition from the deſtruction of Jeruſalem to the end of the world, conceiving that ſuch very bold figures of ſpeech could not with propriety be applied to the ſubverſion and extinction of any city or ſtate, however great and powerful. But the fact is, that theſe very ſame metaphors do frequently in ſcripture denote the deſtruction of nations, cities, and kingdoms. Thus Iſaiah†, ſpeaking of the deſtruction of Babylon, ſays, "Behold the day of the Lord cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land deſolate, and he ſhall deſtroy the ſinners thereof out of it. For the ſtars of heaven, and the conſtellations thereof, ſhall not give their light; the ſun ſhall be darkened in his going forth and the moon ſhall not cauſe her light to ſhine." And in almoſt the ſame terms he deſcribes the puniſhment of the Idumæans‡, and of Senacherib and his people§. Ezekiel ſpeaks in the ſame manner of Egypt‖; and Daniel, of the ſlaughter of the Jews¶; and, what is ſtill more to the point, the prophet Joel deſcribes this very deſtruction of Jeruſalem in terms very ſimilar to thoſe of Chriſt. "I

* Ch. xiii. 9.
† Ch. xxxiv. 34.
‡ Ch. li. 6.
§ Ch. xxxii. 7, 8.
‖ Ch. viii. 10.

will ſhew wonders in the heavens; and and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of ſmoke. The ſun ſhall be turned into darkneſs, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord ſhall come*."

It is evident then that the phraſes here made uſe of, of "the ſun being darkened, and the moon not giving her light, and the ſtars falling from heaven, and the powers of heaven being ſhaken," are figures meant to expreſs the fall of cities, kingdoms, and nations; and the origin of this ſort of language it well illuſtrated by a late very learned prelate†, who tells us, that in ancient hieroglyphic writing, the ſun, moon, and ſtars, were uſed to repreſent ſtates and empires, kings, queens, and nobility; their eclipſe or extinction denoted temporary diſaſters, or entire overthrow, &c. So the prophets in like manner call kings and empires by the names of the heavenly luminaries. Stars falling from the firmament are employed to denote the deſtruction of the nobility, and other great men; inſomuch, that in reality the prophetic ſtyle ſeems to be *a ſpeaking hieroglyphic*‡."

In the ſame manner, in the next verſe, thoſe awful words, "then ſhall appear the ſign of the Son of man in heaven: and then ſhall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they ſhall ſee the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory," ſeem applicable ſolely to the laſt advent of Chriſt to judge the world; and yet it is certain, that in their primary ſignification they refer to the manifeſtation of Chriſt's power and glory, in coming to execute judgment on the guilty Jews, by the total overthrow of their temple, their city, and their government; for ſo our Lord himſelf explains what is meant by *the coming of the Son of man*, in the 27th, 28th, and 37th verſes of this chapter. And when the prophet Daniel is predicting this very appearance of Chriſt to puniſh the Jews, he deſcribes him as "coming in the clouds of heaven, and there was given him dominion and glory, and a kingdom§."

* Ch. ii. 30, 31. † Biſhop Warburton.
‡ Div. Leg. v. 2. b. iv. s. 4. § Daniel, vii. 14.

The same remark will hold with regard to the 31st verse: "he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of the earth even to the other." These words also, though they seem as if they could belong to no other subject than the last day, yet most assuredly relate principally to the great object of this prophecy, the destruction of Jerusalem; after which dreadful event we are here told, that Christ will send forth his *angels*; that is, his messengers or ministers (for so that word strictly signifies*) to preach his gospel to all the world, which preaching is called by the prophets, "*lifting up* the voice *like a trumpet*†; and they shall gather together his elect (that is, shall collect disciples and converts to the faith) from the four winds, from the four quarters of the earth;" or, as St. Luke expresses it, "from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south‡."

Our Lord then goes on to point out the *time* when all these things shall take place, and thus answers the other question put to him by the disciples, "Tell us, when shall these things be?" "Now learn, says he, a parable of the fig-tree; when his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that the summer is nigh: so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."

The only observation necessary to be made here is, that the time when all these predictions were to be fulfilled is here limited to a certain period. They were to be accomplished before the generation of men then existing should pass away. And accordingly all these events did actually take place within forty years after our Saviour delivered this prophecy; and this by the way is an unanswerable proof, that every thing our Lord had been saying in the preceding part of the chapter related principally, not to

* Vid. Haggai, i. 13. Malach. ii. 7.—iii. 1. Matth. xi. 10. Mark, i. 2. Luke, vii. 27.

† Isaiah, lviii. 1. ‡ Luke xiii. 29.

the day of judgment, or to any other very remote event, but to the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, which did in reality happen before that generation had paſſed away.

"But of that day and hour knoweth no man; no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only;" that is, although the time when Jeruſalem is to be deſtroyed, is, as I have told you, fixed *generally* to this generation, yet the *preciſe day and hour* of that event is not known either to men or angels, but to God only. *This he ſpeaks* in his human nature, and in his prophetic capacity. *This point* was not made known to him by the ſpirit, nor was he commiſſioned to reveal it.

It is ſuppoſed by ſeveral learned commentators, that the words, *that day* and *that hour*, refer to the *day of* judgment, which is immediately alluded to in the preceding verſe, *heaven and earth ſhall paſs away*. This conjecture is an ingenious one, and may be true; but if it be, this verſe ſhould be incloſed in a parentheſis, becauſe what follows moſt certainly relates to the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, (to which St. Luke in the ſeventeenth chapter expreſsly confines it*) and cannot, without great violence to the words, be applied to the final advent of Chriſt. "As the days of Noe were, ſo ſhall alſo the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; ſo ſhall alſo the coming of the Son of man be. Then ſhall two be in the field; the one ſhall be taken, and the other left. Two women ſhall be grinding at the mill; the one ſhall be taken, and the other left." That is, when the day of deſolation ſhall come upon the city and temple of Jeruſalem, the inhabitants will be as thoughtleſs and unconcerned, and as unprepared for it, as the antediluvians were for the flood in the days of Noah. But as ſome (more particularly the Chriſtians) will be more watchful, and in a better ſtate of mind than others, the providence of God will make a diſtinction between his faithful and his

* Luke, xvii. 26, 27, 35, 36.

diſobedient ſervants, and will protect and preſerve the former, but leave the latter to be taken or deſtroyed by their enemies; although they may both be in the ſame ſituation of life, may be engaged in the ſame occupations, and may appear to the world to be in every reſpect in ſimilar circumſtances.

Here ends the prophetical part of our Lord's diſcourſe; what follows is altogether exhortatory. It may be called the moral of the prophecy, and the practical application of it not only to his immediate hearers, but to his diſciples in all future ages; for this concluding admonition moſt certainly alludes no leſs to the final judgment than to the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, and applies with at leaſt equal force to both. Indeed the prophecy itſelf, although in its primary and ſtricteſt ſenſe it relates throughout to the deſtruction of the temple, city, and government of Jeruſalem, yet, as I have before obſerved may be conſidered, and was probably intended by Jeſus, as a type and an emblem of the diſſolution of the world itſelf, to which the total ſubverſion of a great city and a whole nation bears ſome reſemblance. But with reſpect to the concluſion, there can be no doubt of its being intended to call our attention to the laſt ſolemn day of account; and with a view of its producing this effect, I ſhall now preſs it upon your minds in the very words of our Lord, without any comment, for it is too clear to require any explanation, and too impreſſive to require any additional enforcement. "Watch ye therefore, for ye know not at what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the good man of the houſe had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have ſuffered his houſe to be broken up. Therefore be ye alſo ready; for in ſuch an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. Who then is a faithful and a wiſe ſervant, whom his Lord hath made ruler over his houſehold, to give them meat in due ſeaſon? Bleſſed is that ſervant, whom his Lord when he cometh ſhall find ſo doing. Verily I ſay unto you, that he ſhall make him ruler over all his goods. But and if that evil ſervant ſhall ſay in his heart, my

Lord delayeth his coming; and begin to ſmite his fellow-ſervants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; the Lord of that ſervant ſhall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and ſhall cut him aſunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites; there ſhall be weeping and gnaſhing of teeth."

LECTURE XX.

MATTHEW xxiv.—xxv.

IN my laſt Lecture I explained to you that remarkable prophecy reſpecting the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, which is contained in the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew; and by a reference to the hiſtorians who record or mention that event, I proved to you the complete and exact accompliſhment of that wonderful prediction in all its parts. And this, in a common caſe, I ſhould have thought fully ſufficient for your ſatisfaction. But this prophecy ſtands ſo eminently diſtinguiſhed by its ſingular importance, and the great variety of matter which it embraces, and it affords ſo deciſive, ſo irreſiſtible a proof of the divine authority of our religion, that it appears to me to be well worthy of a little more attention and conſideration. I ſhall therefore, before I proceed to the next chapter, make ſuch further remarks upon it, as may tend to throw new light upon the ſubject, to ſhew more diſtinctly the exact correſpondence of the prediction with the event, and to point out the very intereſting concluſions that may be drawn from it.

And firſt I would obſerve, that, in ſome inſtances, the providence of God ſeems evidently to have interpoſed in order to bring about ſeveral of the events, which Jeſus here alludes to or predicts. Thus, in the twelfth year of Nero Ceſtius Gallus, the preſident of Syria, came againſt Jeruſalem with a powerful army; and, as Joſephus aſſures us, he might, had he aſſaulted the city, eaſily have taken it, and thereby have put an end to the war*. But without any apparent reaſon, and contrary to all expectation, he ſuddenly raiſed the ſiege, and departed. This, and ſome other very incidental delays, which took place before Veſpaſian beſieged the city, and Titus ſurrounded it with a wall, gave the Chriſtians within an opportunity

* De Bell. Jud. l. 2. c. 19.

of following our Lord's advice, and of escaping to the mountains, which afterwards it would have been impossible for them to do.

In the same manner the besieged inhabitants themselves helped to fulfil another of our Saviour's predictions, *that those days should be shortened*; for they burnt their own provisions, which would have been sufficient for many years, and fatally deserted their strongest holds, where they never could have been taken by force, the fortifications of the city being considered as impregnable. Titus was so sensible of this, that he himself ascribed his success to God. "We have fought, said he to his friends, with God on our side; and it is God who hath dragged the Jews out of their strong holds; for what could the hands of men and machines do against such towers as these?"*

In the next place, it is worthy of remark, that at the time when our Lord delivered this prophecy, there was not the slightest probability of the Romans invading Judæa, much less of their besieging the city of Jerusalem, of their surrounding it with a wall, of their taking it by storm, and of their destroying the temple so entirely, as not to leave one stone upon another. The Jews were then at perfect peace with the Romans. The latter could have no motives of interest or of policy to invade, destroy, and depopulate a country, which was already subject to them, and from which they reaped many advantages. The fortifications too of the city were (as I have before observed) so strong, that they were deemed invincible by any human force, and it was not the custom of the Romans to demolish and raise the very foundations of the towns they took, and exterminate the inhabitants, but rather to preserve them as monuments of their victories and their triumphs.

It could not therefore be from mere human sagacity and foresight that our Saviour foretold these events; or had he even hazared a conjecture respecting a war with the Romans, and the siege of Jerusalem, yet he could only have done this in general terms; he could never have imagined

* Newton's Dissert. on Prophecy, v. 2. p. 276.

or invented such a variety of minute particulars as he did predict, and as actually came to pass.

It is indeed of great importance to observe the surprizing assemblage of striking circumstances, which Christ pointed out in this prophecy. They are much more numerous than is commonly supposed, and well deserve to be distinctly specified.

They may be arranged under three general heads.

The first consists of those signs that were to *precede* the destruction of Jerusalem.

And these signs were, false Christs, false prophets, rumours of wars, actual wars, nation rising against nation, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, fearful sights, the persecution of the apostles, the apostacy of some Christians, and the treachery of others, the preservation of Christ's faithful disciples, and the propagation of the Gospel through the whole Roman world.

The second head is the commencement of the siege.

Under this head are specified the distinguishing standard of the Roman army, the eagle, with the images of their gods and their emperors affixed to it.

The idolatrous worship paid to this standard, called the *abomination*, for so it was to the Jews.

The planting of this standard near the holy city, and afterwards in the very temple.

The *desolation* which the Roman armies spread around them.

The escape of the Christians to the mountainous country round Jerusalem.

The inconceivable and unparalleled calamities of every kind which the wretched inhabitants endured during the

siege; and the shortening of those days of vengeance on account of the Christians.

The third head is, the actual capture of Jerusalem by the besieging army.

And here it is foretold, "that not one stone of its magnificent buildings should be left upon another;" that the temple, the government, the state, the polity of the Jews, should be utterly subverted: and lastly, that *all* these things should happen before the then present race of men should be extinguished.

If now we collect together the several particulars here specified, they amount to no less than twenty-two in number. A larger detail of minute circumstances than is to be found in any other of our Lord's prophecies; and all these we see actually fulfilled in the history of Josephus, and other ancient writers; and it is extremely remarkable that his description of the siege of Jerusalem, like this prophecy, is more minutely circumstantial and more spread out into detail, than the account of any other siege that we have in ancient history. It should seem therefore as if this historian was purposely raised up by Providence to record this memorable event, and to verify our Saviour's predictions. And indeed no one could possibly be better qualified for the task than he, from his situation and circumstances, from his integrity and veracity, and above all from the opportunities he had of being perfectly well acquainted with every thing he relates.

He was born at Jerusalem, under the reign of the emperor Caligula, and about seven years after our Lord's crucifixion. He was of a noble family; on his father's side descended from the most illustrious of the high priests; and on his mother's side, from the blood royal. At the age of nineteen, after having made a trial of all the different sects of the Jews, he embraced that of the Pharisees; and at the age of twenty-six he made a journey to Rome, to obtain from Nero the release of some Jewish priests, who had been thrown into bonds by Felix the procurator of Judæa. He succeeded in this business; and on

his return to Jeruſalem found his countrymen reſolved on commencing hoſtilities againſt the Romans, from which he endeavored to diſſuade them, but in vain. He was ſoon after appointed by the Jewiſh government to the command of an army in Galilee, where he ſignalized himſelf in many engagements; but at the ſiege of Jotapata was taken priſoner by Veſpaſian, and afterwards carried by Titus to the ſiege of Jeruſalem, where he was an eye-witneſs of every thing that paſſed, till the city was taken and deſtroyed by the Romans. He then compoſed his hiſtory of the Jewiſh war, and particularly of the ſiege and capture of Jeruſalem, in ſeven books; which he firſt wrote in Hebrew, and afterwards in Greek, and preſented it to Veſpaſian and Titus, by both of whom it was highly approved, and ordered to be made public. And it is in this hiſtory that we find the accompliſhment of all the ſeveral facts and events relative to the ſiege and the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, which our Saviour foretold forty years before they happened, and which have been above recited. This hiſtory is ſpoken of in the higheſt terms by men of the greateſt learning and the ſoundeſt judgment, from its firſt publication to the preſent time.

The fidelity, the veracity, and probity of the writer, are univerſally allowed; and Scaliger in particular declares, that not only in the affairs of the Jews, but even of foreign nations, he deſerves more credit than all the Greek and Romon writers put together*. Certain at leaſt it is, that he had that moſt eſſential qualification of an hiſtorian, a perfect and accurate knowledge of all the tranſactions which he relates; that he had no prejudices to miſlead him in the repreſentation of them; and that, above all, he meant no favor to the Chriſtian cauſe. For even allowing the ſo much controverted paſſage, in which he is ſuppoſed to bear teſtimony to Chriſt, to be genuine, it does not appear that he ever became a convert to his religion, but continued probably a zealous Jew to the end of his life.

From this account it is evident, that we may moſt ſecurely rely on every thing he tells us reſpecting the ſiege of

* In Prolegom. ad opus de Emendatione Temporum.

Jeruſalem: and that nothing can more completely demonſtrate the truth of our bleſſed Lord's predictions, than the uncorrupt, impartial, and undeſigned teſtimony given to their completion by this juſtly celebrated hiſtorian.

Here then we have a proof, which it is impoſſible to controvert, of our Saviour's perfect knowledge of future events, which belongs ſolely to God, and to thoſe inſpired and ſent by him; which of courſe eſtabliſhes, in the cleareſt manner, the divine miſſion of Chriſt, and the divine origin of our religion.

The only pretence that can poſſibly be ſet up againſt this prophecy is, that it was not delivered by our Saviour previous to the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, but inſerted afterwards by St. Matthew and the other evangeliſts, ſubſequent to that event. This may undoubtedly be ſaid, and any thing may be ſaid by thoſe whoſe trade is objection and cavil: but can it be ſaid with the ſmalleſt appearance of truth? Is there the ſlighteſt ground to ſupport it? Moſt certainly not. It is a mere gratuitous aſſertion without the leaſt ſhadow of proof; and an oppoſite aſſertion is a *ſufficient* anſwer to it. We deny the fact; and call upon our adverſaries to prove it, if they can: they have never ſo much as attempted it. Not even the *earlieſt* enemies of our faith, thoſe who were much nearer the primitive ages, and much more likely to detect a fraud in the evangelical writers (if there were any) than modern infidels, even theſe never intimate the ſlighteſt ſuſpicion that this prophecy was inſerted after the event.

But beſides this, there are good grounds to believe, not only that the three Goſpels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, where this prophecy is related, were written and publiſhed before the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, but that the writers of them were all dead before that event. It is alſo well known, that both St. Peter, and St. Paul, who allude in their Epiſtles to the approaching ruin of Jeruſalem* (which they learnt from our Lord's predictions,) and who had ſeen and approved the Goſpels of St. Mark and St.

* Acts ii. 19. 1 Pet. iv. 7. Phil. iv. 5. 1 Theſs. ii. 16. Newton on Proph. v. 2. p. 225. Jortin's Remarks, vol. i. p. 49.

Luke, were put to death under Nero, and Jeruſalem was not taken till the ſucceeding reign of Veſpaſian.

It ſhould be obſerved further, that although this prophecy is by far the fulleſt, and cleareſt, and moſt diſtinct, that our Lord delivered reſpecting the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, he plainly, though briefly alludes to it in ſeveral other parts of the Goſpels*. And theſe occaſional predictions of that event are ſo frequent, and ſo perfectly agree with this larger prophecy, they are introduced ſo incidentally in the way of parables, or in anſwer to ſome queſtion; they ariſe, in ſhort, ſo naturally from the occaſion, and are ſo inartificially interwoven into the very eſſence and ſubſtance of the narrative, that they have every imaginable appearance of having formed an original part of it, and cannot poſſibly be conſidered by any good judge of compoſition as ſubſequent or fraudulent inſertions.

Indeed ſuch a fabrication as this would have been the ſilliеſt and moſt uſeleſs fraud that can be imagined. For it is very remarkable that the ſacred writers make no uſe of this prophecy as a proof of our Saviour's divine powers, or of the truth of his religion. They appeal frequently to the ancient prophecies concerning him, to his miracles, and above all to his reſurrection, as evidences that he was the Meſſiah, and the Son of God; but they never appeal to the accompliſhment of this prophecy in ſupport of thoſe great truths, though certainly a very natural and important proof to be adduced in favor of them.

But that which ought, with every reaſonable man, to be deciſive of the queſtion, is this, that three of the evangeliſts out of four concur in giving us this prophecy as a part of their hiſtory of our Lord, and as actually delivered by him at the period aſſigned to it, which we know was nearly forty years before the deſtruction of Jeruſalem. Now we have no more reaſon to doubt their veracity in *this* point than in any other; and if, on the ſtrength of their character, on the evident marks of integrity, ſimplicity, and truth, which appear in every

* Matth. xxii. 1—7; xxiii. 33—39. Luke xix. 41—44; xiii. 1—5; &c. &c.

page of their writings; and above all, if in consequence of their undergoing the bittereſt ſufferings as an evidence of their ſincerity, we give implicit credit to what they tell us reſpecting the life, the death, the doctrines, the miracles, and the reſurrection of Chriſt, there is the very ſame reaſon for admitting the genuineneſs of this prophecy. It ſtands on the ſame ſolid grounds of *their veracity and probity*, as the reſt of the Goſpel does; and when men lay down their lives, as they did, in confirmation of what they aſſert they have ſurely ſome right to be believed.

We may then ſafely conſider this prophecy as an unqueſtionable proof of the divine foreknowledge of our Lord, and the divine authority of the Goſpel; and on this ground only (were it neceſſary) we might ſecurely reſt the whole fabric of our religion. Indeed this remarkable prediction has always been conſidered, by every impartial perſon, as one of the moſt powerful arguments in favor of Chriſtianity; and in our own times, more particularly, a man of diſtinguiſhed talents and acknowledged eminence in his profeſſion, and in the conſtant habit of weighing, ſifting, and ſcrutinizing evidence with the minuteſt accuracy in courts of juſtice, has publicly declared, that he conſidered this prophecy, if there were nothing elſe to ſupport Chriſtianity, as *abſolutely irreſiſtible**.

But our Lord's predictions reſpecting this devoted city do not end even here. He not only foretels the entire deſtruction of Jeruſalem, but the *continuance* of its deſo-

* See Mr. Erſkine's eloquent ſpeech at the trial of Williams, for publiſhing Paine's Age of Reaſon; to which I muſt beg leave to add the weighty and important teſtimony of that moſt able and upright judge, Lord Kenyon, who, in his charge to the jury on the ſame occaſion made this noble CONFESSION OF FAITH:

"I am fully impreſſed with the great truths of religion, which, thank God, I was taught in my early years to believe; and which the hour of reflection and inquiry, inſtead of creating any doubt, has fully confirmed me in." How vain are all the idle cavils of the whole tribe of infidels put together, when contraſted with ſuch a declaration as this from ſuch a man!

Since this note was written, the public has to lament the loſs of this truly great man. But he is now at reſt from his virtuous labors; and he will long be remembered and revered, not only by his own profeſſion, but by all deſcriptions of men, as the firm friend and intrepid protector of the laws, the conſtitution, the morals, and the religion of this country.

lation and ſubjection to heathens, and the diſperſion and captivity of the Jews for a long period of time. For if we turn to the parallel place in St. Luke, we ſhall find him expreſſing himſelf in theſe words, reſpecting the Jews and their city; "they ſhall fall by the edge of the ſword, and ſhall be led away captive into all nations; and Jeruſalem ſhall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled*." That is, not only vaſt numbers of the Jews ſhall periſh at the ſiege of Jeruſalem, partly by their own ſeditions, and partly by the ſword of the enemy, but multitudes ſhall alſo be made captives, and be diſperſed into all countries; and Jeruſalem ſhall remain in a ſtate of deſolation and oppreſſion, trampled upon and trodden down by heathen conquerors and rulers, till all the Gentiles ſhall be converted to the faith of Chriſt, and the Jews themſelves ſhall acknowledge him to be the Meſſiah, and ſhall be reſtored to their ancient city.

The former part of this propheoy has been already moſt exactly fulfilled, and is an earneſt that all the reſt will in due time be accompliſhed. The number of Jews ſlain during the ſiege was upwards of one million one hundred thouſand, and near three hundred thouſand more were deſtroyed in other places in the courſe of the war†. Beſides theſe as Joſephus informs us, no leſs than ninety-ſeven thouſand were made captives and diſperſed into different countries, ſome into Egypt, ſome to Cæſarea, ſome carried to grace the triumph of Titus at Rome, and the reſt diſtributed over the Roman provinces‡; and the whole Jewiſh people continue to this hour ſcattered over all the nations of the earth.

With reſpect to their city, it has remained for the moſt part in a ſtate of ruin and deſolation, from its deſtruction by the Romans to the preſent time; and has never been under the government of the Jews themſelves, but oppreſſed and broken down by a ſucceſſion of foreign maſters, the Romans, the Saracens, the Franks, the Mamalukes, and laſt by the Turks, to whom it is ſtill ſubject.

* Luke xxi. 24. † Bell. Jud. l. 2, 3, 4, 7, &c.
‡ Joſephus Bell. Jud. l. vi. c. 9.

It is not therefore only in the hiſtory of Joſephus, and in other ancient writers, that we are to look for the accompliſhment of our Lord's predictions; we ſee them verified at this moment before our eyes, in the deſolated ſtate of the once celebrated city and temple of Jeruſalem, and in the preſent condition of the Jewiſh people, not collected together into any one country, into one political ſociety, and under one form of government, but diſperſed over every region of the globe, and every where treated with contumely and ſcorn.

There was indeed one attempt made to rebuild their temple and their city, and reſtore them to their ancient proſperity and ſplendor. It was made too for the expreſs and avowed purpoſe of defeating that very prophecy we have been conſidering; and the event was ſuch *as might* be expected from the folly and preſumption of the man who dared to oppoſe the deſigns of Providence, and to fight againſt God. This man was the emperor Julian, who, as you all know, was firſt a Chriſtian, then apoſtatized from that religion, profeſſed himſelf a pagan, and became a bitter and avowed enemy to the Goſpel. *This prince* aſſured the Jews, that if he was ſucceſsful in the Perſian war, he would rebuild their city, reſtore *them* to their habitations, re-eſtabliſh their government and their religion, and join with them in worſhipping the great God of the univerſe. He actually begun this ſingular enterprize, by attempting to rebuild their temple with the greateſt magnificence. He aſſigned immenſe ſums for the ſtructure; and gave it in charge to Alypius of Antioch, who had formerly been lieutenant in Britain, to ſuperintend the work. Alypius exerted himſelf with great vigour, and was aſſiſted in it by the governor of the province. But ſoon after they had begun the work, dreadful balls of fire burſting out from the foundations in ſeveral parts, rendered the place inacceſſible to the workmen, who were frequently burnt with the flames; and in this manner, the fiery elements obſtinately repelling them, forced them at length to abandon the deſign. The account of this extraordinary miracle we have not only from ancient Chriſtian writers of credit, who lived at the very time when it happened, but from an heathen author of great veracity, Ammianus

Marcellinus, who wrote the history of Roman affairs from Nerva to the death of Valens, in the year 378. Though he wrote in Latin, he was a Greek by birth. He had several honourable military commands under different emperors; was with Julian in his Persian expedition, in the year 363, and was a great admirer of that emperor, whom he makes his hero; yet acknowledges that his attempt to rebuild the temple of Jerusalem was defeated in the manner I have mentioned*. The fact is frequently appealed to by the Christians of those days, who affirm that it was in the mouths of all men, and was not denied even by the atheists themselves; and "if it seem yet incredible to any one, he may repair (say they) both to witnesses of it yet living, and to them who have heard it from their mouths; yea, they may view the foundations, lying yet bare and naked†." And of this, says Chrysostom, all we Christians are witnesses; these things being done not long since in our own time‡.

Such are the testimonies for this miracle, which are collected and stated with great force by the learned Bishop Warburton, in his work called Julian; and most of them are also admitted by Mr. Gibbon, who, in his recital of this miracle, acknowledges that it is attested by *contemporary and respectable evidence*; that Gregory Nazianzen, who published his account of it before the expiration of the same year, declares it was not disputed by the infidels of those days, and that his testimony is confirmed by the *unexceptionable testimony* of Ammianus Marcellinus‖.

I now proceed to the explanation of the next chapter, the 25th of St. Matthew, which begins with presenting to us two parables, that of the ten virgins, and that of the servants of a great Lord entrusted with different talents, of which they are called upon to render an account. As these parables contain nothing that requires a very particular explanation, I shall content myself with observing, that they are designed to carry on the subject

* Ammianus Marcellinus, l. xxiii. c. 1. p. 350. Ed. Valesii.
† Sozomen. Hist. Eccles. l. v. c. 22. p. 632. D. 633. B.
‡ Chrys. adv. Judæos. Orat. iii. p. 436.
‖ History of the Roman Empire, v. ii. p. 388.

with which the preceding chapter concludes; namely, that of the laſt ſolemn day of retribution; and the object of both is to call our attention to that great event, and to warn us of the neceſſity of being always prepared for it. Thus in the parable of the ten virgins, the five that were wiſe took oil in their veſſels with their lamps, and when the bridegroom appeared they were ready to receive him, and went in with him to the marriage. But the five that were fooliſh took no oil with them; and while they went to procure it, the bridegroom *unexpectedly* came, and the door was *ſhut* againſt them. The application is obvious, and is given by our Lord himſelf in theſe words, "watch ye therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour when the Lord cometh."

In the ſame manner, in the parable of the *talents*, he that had received the five talents and he that had received the two, did, during the abſence of their Lord, ſo diligently cultivate and ſo conſiderably improve them, that when at length he came to reckon with them, they returned him his own again with uſury, and received both applauſe and reward: while that ſlothful and indolent ſervant, who had received only one talent, and *inſtead* of improving it went and hid it in the earth, when his Lord came and required it at his hands, was ſeverely reprimanded for his want of activity and exertion, and was caſt out as an unprofitable ſervant into outer darkneſs.

This, like the former parable, was plainly meant to intimate to us that we ought to be *always prepared* to meet our Lord, and to give him a good account of the uſe we have made of our time, and of the talents, whether many or few, that were entruſted to our care.

After theſe admonitory parables, and theſe earneſt exhortations to prepare for the laſt great day, our bleſſed Lord is naturally led on to a deſcription of the day itſelf; and it is a deſcription which for dignity and grandeur has not its equal in any writer, ſacred or profane. It is as follows: "When the Son of man ſhall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then ſhall he ſit upon the throne of his glory: and before him ſhall be gathered all

nations; and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, and the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he also say unto those on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked and ye clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal."

Such is the description which our divine Master gives us of the great day of account; and so solemn, so awful, so sublime a scene, was never before presented to the mind of man.

Our Saviour represents himself as a great and mighty King, as the supreme Lord of all, sitting on the throne of his glory, with *all the nations of the earth assembled before him*, and waiting their final doom from his lips. What an astonishing and stupendous spectacle is this! He then

at one glance, which penetrates the hearts of every individual of that immenſe multitude, diſcerns the reſpective merits or demerits of every human being there preſent, and ſeparates the good from the bad with as much eaſe as a ſhepherd divides his ſheep from his goats. He next queſtions them on one moſt important branch of their duty, as a *ſpecimen* of the manner in which the inquiry into the whole of their behaviour will be conducted; and then, with the authority of an almighty Judge and Sovereign, he in a few words pronounces the irreverſible ſentence, which conſigns the wicked to everlaſting puniſhment, and the righteous to life eternal.

Before I preſs this important ſubject any further on the hearts of thoſe who hear me, I muſt make a few obſervations on the deſcription which has been juſt laid before you.

The firſt is, that all mankind, when aſſembled before the judgment ſeat of Chriſt, are divided into two great claſſes, the wicked and the good, thoſe who are puniſhed, and thoſe who are rewarded. There is no middle, no intermediate ſtation provided for thoſe who may be called neutrals in religion, who are indifferent and lukewarm, who are "neither hot nor cold," who do not reject the Goſpel, but give themſelves very little concern about it, who, inſtead of working out their ſalvation with fear and trembling, leave that matter to take care of itſelf, and are at perfect eaſe as to the event. Theſe men cannot certainly expect to inherit everlaſting life. But they hope probably to be conſidered as harmleſs inoffenſive beings, and to be exempted from puniſhment at leaſt, if not entitled to reward. But how vain this hope is, our Saviour's repreſentation of the final judgment moſt clearly ſhows. They who are not ſet on the right, muſt go to the left. They who are not rewarded, are conſigned to puniſhment. There are indeed different manſions both for the righteous and the wicked; there are different degrees of puniſhment for the one, and of reward for the other; yet ſtill it does not appear that there is any middle or intermediate ſtate between puniſhment and reward.

The next remark, and which has ſome affinity to the laſt, is, that we are to be examined at the bar of our great Judge, not merely as to our exemption from crimes, but as to our performance of good actions; ſubſtantial and genuine Chriſtian virtues are expected at our hands. It will not be ſufficient for us to plead that we kept ourſelves clear from ſin, we muſt ſhew that we have exerted ourſelves in the faithful diſcharge of all thoſe various important duties which the Goſpel requires from us.

Laſtly, it muſt be obſerved, and it is an obſervation of the utmoſt importance, and which I wiſh to impreſs moſt forcibly upon your minds, that although charity to our neighbor, and indeed only one branch of that comprehenſive duty, viz. *liberality to the poor*, is here ſpecified, as the only Chriſtian virtue, concerning which inquiry will be made at the day of judgment; yet we muſt not imagine that this is the only virtue which will be expected from us, and that on this alone will depend our final ſalvation. Nothing can be more diſtant from truth, or more dangerous to religion, than this opinion. The fact is, that charity, or love to man in all its extent, being the moſt eminent of all the evangelical virtues, being that which Chriſt has made the very badge and diſcriminating mark of his religion, is here conſtituted by him the repreſentative of all other virtues; juſt as Faith is, in various paſſages of ſcripture, uſed to denote and repreſent the whole Chriſtian religion. Nothing is more common than this ſort of figure (called a ſynecdoche) in profane, as well as ſacred writers; by which a part, an eſſential and important part, is made to ſtand for the whole. But that neither charity nor any other ſingle virtue can entitle us to eternal life, is clear from the whole tenor of the New Teſtament, which every where requires univerſal holineſs of life. We are commanded "to ſtand perfect and complete in *all* the will of God*;" to add to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godlineſs, and to godlineſs brotherly kindneſs, and to brotherly kindneſs charity†. Here you ſee that charity makes only one in that

* Col. iv. 12. † 1 Pet. i. 6.

large aſſemblage of virtues, which are required to conſtitute the Chriſtian character. And ſo far is it from being true, that any ſingle virtue will give us admiſſion into the kingdom of heaven, that St. James lays down a *directly* oppoſite doctrine; namely, that if we do not to the *beſt* of our power cultivate *every* virtue without exception, we ſhall be objects of puniſhment, inſtead of reward. "Whoſoever, ſays he, ſhall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." Nay, *even if we* endeavor to fulfil *all* righteouſneſs, yet it is not on *that righteouſneſs*, but on the merits of our Redeemer, that we muſt rely for our acceptance with God. For the plain doctrine of ſcripture is, that it "*is* the blood of Jeſus Chriſt that cleanſeth us from all ſin*;" and that "by grace we are ſaved through faith; and that *not of ourſelves*, it is the gift of God." Of this, indeed, no notice is taken in our Saviour's deſcription of the laſt judgment, and that for a plain reaſon; becauſe he had not yet finiſhed the gracious work of our redemption. He had not yet offered himſelf up, upon the croſs as a ſacrifice, a propitiation for the ſins of the whole world. But after that great act of mercy was performed, it is then the *uniform* language of the ſacred writers, "that we are juſtified freely by the grace of God, through the redemption that is in Chriſt Jeſus†."

We muſt therefore collect the terms of our ſalvation not from any one paſſage of ſcripture, but from the whole tenor of the ſacred writings taken together; and if we judge by this rule, which is the only one that can be ſecurely relied upon, we ſhall find that nothing leſs than a ſincere and lively faith in Chriſt, producing in us, as far as the infirmity of our nature will allow, *univerſal holineſs of life*, can ever make our final calling and election ſure. But thus much we may certainly collect from our Lord's repreſentation of our final judgment, that charity, or love to man, in the true ſcriptural ſenſe of that word, is one of the moſt eſſential duties of our religion; and that to neglect that virtue, above all others, which our Redeemer and our Judge has ſelected as the peculiar object

* 1 John, i. 7. Ephes. ii. 8. † Rom. iii. 24.

of his approbation, and as the repreſentative of all the other evangelical virtues, muſt be peculiarly dangerous, and render us peculiarly unfit to appear at the laſt day before the great tribunal of Chriſt.

How ſoon we may be ſummoned there, no one can tell. The final diſſolution of this earthly ſyſtem may be at a great diſtance; but what is the ſame thing to every moral and religious purpoſe, *death* may be very near. It is at leaſt even to the youngeſt of us uncertain, and in whatever ſtate it overtakes us, in that ſtate will judgment find us; for there is no repentance in the grave, and as we die ſo ſhall we ſtand before our Almighty Judge. "Take heed therefore to yourſelves, leſt at any time your hearts be overcharged with ſurfeiting, and drunkenneſs, and the cares of this life, and ſo that day come upon you unawares. For as a ſnare ſhall it come upon all them that dwell on the face of the earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to eſcape all theſe things that ſhall come upon you, and to ſtand before the Son of man*."

* Luke xxi. 34.

LECTURE XXI.

MATTHEW xxvi.

WE are now approaching the laſt ſad ſcene of our Saviour's life, which commences with the 26th chapter, and continues in a progreſſive accumulation of one miſery upon another to the end of St. Matthew's Goſpel.

The 26th chapter, which will be the ſubject of the preſent Lecture, begins with informing us that two days before the great Feaſt of the Paſſover, the chief prieſts, and the ſcribes and the elders of the people aſſembled together unto the palace of the high prieſt, who was called Caiaphas, and conſulted that they might take Jeſus by ſubtilty and kill him.

Whilſt they were thus employed, Jeſus himſelf was in Bethany (a ſmall village near Jeruſalem) at the houſe of a perſon called Simon, whom he had cured of a leproſy; and here an incident took place which marks at once the manners of the country and the times, and places in a ſtriking point of view the different characters of the ſeveral perſons concerned in it.

"As Jeſus was ſitting at meat in the houſe above mentioned, there came unto him a woman, having an alabaſter box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head. But when his diſciples ſaw it, they had indignation, ſaying, to what purpoſe is this waſte? For this ointment might have been ſold for much, and given to the poor. When Jeſus underſtood it, he ſaid unto them, why trouble ye the woman, for ſhe hath wrought a good work upon me? For ye have the poor always with you, but me ye have not always. For in that ſhe hath poured this oint-

ment on my body, she did it for my burial. Verily I say unto you, wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there also shall this which this woman hath done be told for a memorial of her."

There are in this little story several circumstances that deserve our notice.

The first is, that the act here mentioned of pouring the ointment on the head of Jesus, though it may appear strange to us, yet was perfectly conformable to the customs of ancient times, not only in Asia, but in the more polished parts of Europe. Chaplets of flowers and odoriferous unguents are mentioned by several classic authors, as in use at the festive entertainments both of the Greeks and Romans, and particularly among the Jews, the custom of anointing the head seems to have been almost as common a practice as that of washing the face. For they are mentioned together by our Lord in his direction to his disciples on the subject of fasting. "But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face, that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which seeth in secret*."

But there was a much higher purpose to which the effusion of ointment on the head was applied to the Jews.—It was by this ceremony that Kings, Priests, and Prophets, were set apart and consecrated to their respective offices.—And for this reason it was that our blessed Lord himself, who united in his own person the threefold character of King, Priest, and Prophet, was distinguished by the name of the MESSIAH, which in the Hebrew language means THE ANOINTED. It was therefore with peculiar propriety that this discriminating mark of respect was shewn to Jesus by the devout woman here mentioned, though she herself was probably altogether unconscious of that propriety. Jesus however saw at once the piety of her heart, and the purity of her intentions, and with that sweetness of temper, and urbanity of manners which were natural to him, not only accepted her humble offering with com-

* Matth. vi. 17.

placency, but generouſly defended her againſt the illiberal cavils of his faſtidious followers. And then he added a promiſe of that diſtinguiſhed honor which ſhould perpetuate this meritorious act of her's to all future ages. "Verily I ſay unto you, that wherefoever this Goſpel ſhall be preached in the whole world, there ſhall alſo this that this woman hath done be told for a memorial of her." This we know was no vain prediction; it has been moſt literally and punctually fulfilled, and we ourſelves are witneſſes of its completion at this very moment.

The next remarkable occurrence in this chapter, is the inſtitution of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper by our Saviour, when he was eating the paſſover with his diſciples.

The paſſover was one of the moſt ſolemn and ſacred feaſts of the Jews. It was ſo called becauſe it was eſtabliſhed in commemoration of the deliverance of the Jews from their bondage in Egypt, at which time the deſtroying angel, when he put to death the firſt-born of the Egyptians, *paſſed over* the houſes of the Iſraelites, which were all marked with the blood of the lamb that had been killed and eaten the evening before in every Hebrew houſe, and was therefore called the *Paſchal Lamb*.

This great feſtival our Saviour obſerved with his diſciples, the evening before he ſuffered, and with them ate the paſchal lamb, which was a prophetic type of himſelf. For he was the *real* paſchal lamb that was ſacrificed for the ſins of men. He was the lamb ſlain from the foundation of the world*.

The lamb without blemiſh and without ſpot†, as the paſchal lamb was ordered to be‡. There can be no doubt therefore that the paſchal lamb of the Jews was meant to be an emblem of our Lord. The ſlaying of that lamb prefigured the ſlaying of Chriſt upon the croſs; and as thoſe houſes which were ſprinkled with the blood of the lamb were paſſed over by the deſtroying angel, ſo they whoſe

* Rev. xiii. 8. † 1 Pet. i. 19. ‡ Ex. xii. 5.

ſouls are ſprinkled with the blood of Chriſt are ſaved from deſtruction, and their ſins *paſſed over* and forgiven for his ſake. And it is a very remarkable circumſtance, that our Saviour was crucified, and our deliverance from the bondage of ſin compleated, in the ſame month, and on the ſame day of the month, that the Iſraelites were delivered from the bondage of Egypt, by their departure from that land. For the Iſraelites went out of Egypt, and Chriſt was put to death, on the fifteenth day of the month Niſan.

I have premiſed thus much reſpecting the paſſover and the paſchal lamb, becauſe it will throw conſiderable *light* on the true nature and meaning of the ſacrament of the Lord's Supper, which Jeſus now inſtituted, and of *which* the evangeliſt gives the following account: "When the even was come, our Lord ſat down with the twelve to eat the paſſover; and as they were eating, Jeſus took bread, and bleſſed it, and brake it, and gave it to his diſciples, and ſaid, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, ſaying, Drink ye all of it: for this is my blood of the New Teſtament, which is ſhed for many for the remiſſion of ſins." This is the whole of the inſtitution of this ſacred rite by our bleſſed Lord, as recorded in St. Matthew's Goſpel; and nothing can be more evident than that when he brake the bread, and gave it to his diſciples, and ſaid, Take, eat, this is my body; he meant to ſay that the bread was to repreſent his body, and the breaking of it was to repreſent the breaking of his body upon the croſs. In the ſame manner when he took the cup and gave thanks, and gave it to them, ſaying, "Drink ye all of it, for this is my blood of the New Teſtament (or New Covenant) which is ſhed for many, for the remiſſion of ſins;" his meaning was, that the wine in the cup was to be a repreſentation of his blood that was ſhed upon the croſs as an expiation and atonement for the ſins of the whole world. And his diſciples were to eat the bread and drink the wine ſo conſecrated, and ſo appropriated to this particular purpoſe, in grateful remembrance of what our Lord ſuffered for their ſalvation, and that of all mankind; for St. Luke adds theſe affecting and impreſſive words of our Saviour, *this do in remembrance of me.*

The Lord's Supper therefore was evidently to be a ſolemn commemoration and recognition of the redemption and deliverance of mankind by the death of Chriſt, as the feaſt of the paſſover was of the deliverance of the Iſraelites from the deſtroying angel. Nor is this all; for as the Jews were accuſtomed in their peace offerings to eat a part of the victim, and thus partook of the ſacrifice; ſo they would perceive that in this *new* inſtitution, the eating of the bread and drinking of the wine was a mark and ſymbol of their participating in the effects of this *new* peace offering, the death of Chriſt; whoſe body was broken, and whoſe blood was ſhed for them on the croſs.

They would alſo ſee that this ſupper of our Lord was from that time to be ſubſtituted in the room of the paſſover; and that they might have no doubt on this head, our Lord expreſsly declares that this was to be the caſe; for immediately after the inſtitution of this ſacrament he adds, "I ſay unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it *new* with you in my Father's kingdom." The meaning is, this is the laſt time that this ſupper ſhall be a repreſentation of the paſſover. It ſhall hereafter take a *new* ſignification. When my kingdom (that is, my religion) is fully confirmed and eſtabliſhed by my riſing from the dead, this ſupper ſhall be the memorial of a more noble ſacrifice. The paſſover, which was a type of the redemption to be wrought by me, ſhall be fulfilled and completed by my death and reſurrection. The ſhadow paſſes away; the ſubſtance takes place; and when you eat this ſupper in remembrance of me, there will I be virtually preſent amongſt you; and your ſouls ſhall be nouriſhed and refreſhed by my grace, as your bodies are by the bread and wine.

You will perceive, by what I have here ſaid on the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, that I have confined myſelf to that which was immediately before me, the original inſtitution of it by our bleſſed Lord. I have not entered into thoſe further illuſtrations of this holy rite, which are preſented to us in other parts of ſcripture; particularly in the 11th chapter of the Firſt Epiſtle to the Corinthians. To go at length into the conſideration of this important

ſubject, would lead me into a much longer diſcuſſion than the nature of this diſcourſe will admit. I ſhall therefore only obſerve further, that whoever reads with attention this firſt inſtitution of the Lord's Supper, whoever reflects that it was the very laſt meal that our Lord ate with his diſciples that the next day he underwent for our ſakes a moſt excruciating and ignominious death, and that he requires us to receive this ſacrament *in remembrance of him*; whoever, I ſay, can, notwithſtanding all this, diſobey the laſt command of his dying Redeemer, muſt be deſtitute, not only of all the devout ſentiments of a Chriſtian, but of all the honeſt feelings of a man.

After having thus kept the paſſover for the laſt time, our Lord and his apoſtles ſung a hymn, as was uſual with the Jews after their repaſts; and the hymn they ſung on this occaſion was probably what they called *the Paſchal Pſalms*, from the 113th to the 118th, in which the diſciples, accuſtomed to that recital, readily joined. They then went out into the mount of Olives; and as they were going, Jeſus ſaith unto them, "All ye ſhall be *offended* becauſe of me this night: for it is written, I will ſmite the ſhepherd, and the ſheep of the flock ſhall be ſcattered abroad. But after I am riſen again, I will go before you into Galilee." This was a prophetic warning to the diſciples, that they would all be terrified by the dangers that awaited him, and would deſert and virtually renounce him that very night. The words here quoted, "I will ſmite the ſhepherd, and the ſheep of the flock ſhall be ſcattered abroad," are from the thirteenth chapter of Zechariah. But to conſole and ſupport them under this trial, our Lord aſſures them that he would riſe again from the dead, and after his reſurrection he would meet them at a certain place he appointed in Galilee. The apoſtles, as we may eaſily imagine, were greatly hurt at this admonitory prediction of our Lord, and proteſted that they would never forſake him. But St. Peter more particularly, who, from the ardour of his diſpoſition, was always more forward in his profeſſions, and more indignant at the ſlighteſt reflection on his character, than any of the reſt, immediately cried out with warmth and eagerneſs, "Though all men ſhould be offended becauſe of thee, yet

will I *never* be offended." But Jeſus, who knew him much better than he did himſelf, ſaid unto him "Verily I ſay unto you, that this night before the cock crow (that is, before three in the morning) thou ſhalt deny me thrice." Peter, ſtill confident of his own integrity and ſincere attachment to his divine Maſter, and ignorant of the weakneſs of human nature at the approach of danger, replied, with ſtill greater vehemence, "Though I ſhould die with thee, yet will I not deny thee;" and the reſt of the diſciples joined with him in theſe earneſt proteſtations of inviolable fidelity. How far they were verified by the event we ſhall ſoon ſee.

We are now arrived at a very awful and ſomewhat myſterious part of our Saviour's hiſtory, his agony in the garden, which is next related to us by St. Matthew.

"Then cometh Jeſus, ſays the evangeliſt, with them to a place called Gethſemane, a rich valley near the mount of Olives, through which ran the brook Cedron, and on this ſide was a garden, into which Jeſus entered. And he ſaid unto his diſciples, Sit ye here (at the entrance probably of the garden) while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him, into a more retired part of the garden, Peter, and the two ſons of Zebedee, James and John, the very ſame diſciples who accompanied him at his transfiguration; that they who had been witneſſes of his glory might be witneſſes alſo of his humiliation and affliction. Then ſaith he unto them, My ſoul is exceeding ſorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, ſaying, O my Father, if it be poſſible (that is, if it be poſſible for man to be ſaved, and thy glory promoted as effectually in any other way as by my death) let this cup, this bitter cup of affliction, paſs from me; nevertheleſs, not as I will, but as thou wilt. And he cometh unto his diſciples, and findeth them aſleep, and ſaith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? you who ſo lately made ſuch vehement profeſſions of attachment to me! Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." Ye have need to watch and pray for your own ſakes, as well as mine, that you may not be

overcome by the ſevere trials that await you, nor be tempted to deſert me. Yet at the ſame moment, feeling for the infirmity of human nature, he adds, "the ſpirit indeed is willing, but the fleſh is weak." That is, I know your hearts are right, and your intentions good; but the weakneſs of your frail nature overpowers your beſt reſolutions, "and the thing which ye would ye do not." "He went away again the ſecond time, and prayed, ſaying, O my Father, if this cup may not paſs away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. And he came and found them aſleep again, for their eyes were heavy. And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, ſaying the ſame words. Then cometh he to his diſciples, and ſaith unto them, Sleep on *now* and take your reſt: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of ſinners. Riſe, let us be going: behold, *he* is at hand that doth betray me." That is, henceforth, hereafter (for ſo the original ſtrictly means) you may take your reſt; your watching can be of no further uſe to me: my trial is over, my agony is ſubdued, and my deſtiny determined. I ſhall ſoon be betrayed into the hands of ſinners. *Ariſe*, therefore, let us go and meet this danger. *Behold*, he that betrayeth me is at hand.

This is the account given us of what is called our Saviour's agony in the garden; in the nature and circumſtances of which there is certainly ſomething "difficult to be underſtood;" but it is at the ſame time pregnant with inſtruction and conſolation to every diſciple of Chriſt.

We may obſerve in the firſt place that the terror and diſtreſs of our Lord's mind on this occaſion ſeems to have been extreme, and the agony he endured in the higheſt degree poignant and acute. He is ſaid here to be "exceeding ſorrowful, even unto death." St. Mark adds, that he was "ſore amazed and very heavy*;" and St. Luke tells us, that "being in agony he prayed more earneſtly; and his ſweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground†." To what cauſe

* Ch. xiv. 33. † Ch. xxii. 44.

could theſe uncommonly painful ſenſations be owing? There is great reaſon to believe that they could not ariſe ſolely from the fear of death, or of the torments and the ignominy he was about to undergo; for many great and good men, many of the primitive martyrs for inſtance, and of our firſt reformers, have met death and tortures without feeling, at leaſt without expreſſing, ſuch exceſſive terrors of mind as theſe.

But it ſhould be conſidered, that beſides the apprehenſions of a death in the higheſt degree excruciating and diſgraceful, to which in his human nature he would be as liable as any other perſon, there were ſeveral circumſtances peculiar to himſelf, which might exceedingly embitter his feelings, and exaſperate his ſufferings.

In the firſt place, from the foreknowledge of every thing that could befal him, he would have a quicker ſenſe and a keener perception of the torments he was to undergo, than any other perſon could poſſibly have, from the anticipation of future ſufferings.

In the next place, the complicated miſeries which he knew that his death would bring upon his country, for which he manifeſted the tendereſt concern; the diſtreſs in which it would plunge a mother and a friend that were infinitely dear to him; and the cruel perſecutions and afflictions of various kinds, to which he foreſaw that the firſt propagation of his religion would expoſe his beloved diſciples; all theſe conſiderations operating on a mind of ſuch exquiſite ſenſibility as his, muſt make a deep and painful impreſſion, and add many a bitter pang to the anguiſh, which preyed upon his ſoul. Nor is it at all improbable, that *his* great enemy and ours, the prince of darkneſs, whom he came to overthrow, and with whom he maintained a conſtant conflict through life, and triumphed over by his death; it is not I ſay, at all improbable, that this malignant Being ſhould exert his utmoſt power, by preſenting real and raiſing up imaginary terrors, to ſhake the conſtancy of his ſoul, and deter him from the great work he had undertaken. Theſe, and a multitude of other agonizing diſtreſſes, unknown and in-

conceivable to us, which might neceſſarily ſpring from ſo vaſt, ſo momentous, ſo ſtupendous a work, as the ſalvation of a whole world, make a plain diſtinction between our Saviour's ſituation and that of any other martyr to the cauſe of truth, and moſt clearly prove that there never was "a ſorrow in every reſpect like unto his ſorrow*." It is evident, indeed, that there was ſome other cauſe of his agony beſides that of his approaching death: for it is ſaid in the Epiſtle to the Hebrews, that he was *heard in that he feared*† ; that is, was delivered from the terrors that oppreſſed him; and yet we know he was *not* delivered from the *death of the croſs*.

And it ſhould be obſerved in the laſt place, that notwithſtanding his temporary agonies of mind, notwithſtanding he was "ſore amazed and exceeding ſorrowful, even unto death;" nothwithſtanding he prayed moſt earneſtly and fervently "that the bitter cup of affliction might, if poſſible, paſs away from him;" yet, upon the final reſult, he manifeſted the utmoſt firmneſs and fortitude of ſoul: and the conſtant termination of his prayer was, *not my will but thine be done*. He ſubmitted with the *moſt* perfect reſignation to thoſe very calamities which he felt ſo acutely, and deprecated ſo earneſtly; and went out from the garden to meet the dangers that approached him with that noble and dignified addreſs to his ſlumbering diſciples, "Riſe, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me." It is evident then that this remarkable incident in the hiſtory of our Lord, which has given occaſion to ſo much unfounded and idle cavil, inſtead of lowering his character in the ſlighteſt degree, adds freſh luſtre to it, and encreaſes our veneration for his exalted virtues.

And what is of no leſs importance, it preſents to us inſtructions the moſt edifying, and reflections the moſt conſolatory to the weakneſs of our nature.

We ſee in the firſt place, that our Lord did not pretend to that unfeeling heroiſm, that total inſenſibility to pain and affliction, which ſome of the ancient philoſophers af-

* Lam. i. 12. † Heb. v. 7.

fected. On the contrary, in his human nature he felt like a man; he felt the weight of his own ſorrows, and dropt the tear of ſympathy for thoſe of others. To thoſe, therefore, who are oppreſſed and bowed down (as the beſt of men ſometimes are) with a load of grief, who find, as the Pſalmiſt expreſſes it, "their fleſh and their heart failing," and their ſpirits ſinking within them, it muſt be a moſt reviving conſideration to reflect that in this ſtate even of extreme depreſſion, their it is no guilt; that is no mark of God's diſpleaſure; that even his beloved Son was no ſtranger to it; that he was a man of ſorrows, and well acquainted with grief; that therefore he is not a hard, unfeeling obdurate maſter, who cannot be touched with our infirmities, but one who was in all things tried and afflicted as we are, yet without ſin." He knows what ſorrow is; he knows how hard it ſometimes preſſes even on the firmeſt minds; and he will not fail to extend that relief to others, for which even he himſelf applied with ſo much fervency to the Father of all.

From his example too, on this occaſion, we learn what conduct we ought to obſerve when diſtreſs and miſery overtake us. We are not only allowed but encouraged by what *he* did, to put up our petitions to the Throne of grace, for help in time of need. We are permitted to pray for the removal of our calamities with earneſtneſs and with fervour; we may implore the Almighty that the bitter cup of affliction may paſs away from us; but the concluſion muſt always be (what his was) "not my will, O my Father, but thine be done." And one thing we may be aſſured of, that if the evils which overwhelm us are not removed, yet our ſupplications ſhall not be in vain: we ſhall at the leaſt be enabled to bear them. And though we muſt not expect to have an angel ſent from heaven to ſupport us, as was done to Jeſus; yet we may expect, and expect with confidence, that a more than angelic comforter, even the Spirit of God, will ſhed his healing influence over our ſouls, and preſerve us from ſinking even under the ſevereſt trials.

And there is ſtill one further leſſon of no ſmall importance, which this part of our Saviour's hiſtory may teach us.

Extreme affliction, as we all but too well know, has a natural tendency, not only to depreſs our ſpirits, but to ſour our tempers, and to render us fretful and irritable, and ſevere towards the failings of others. But how did it operate on our bleſſed Lord? Inſtead of injuring, it ſeemed rather to improve the heavenly mildneſs of his diſpoſition, and to make him more indulgent to the failings of his followers. For when in the very midſt of all his anguiſh, they could ſo far forget his ſorrows, and their own profeſſions of attachment to him, as to ſink into ſleep, how gentle was his reproof to them for this want of *ſenſibility* and attention to him? "Could you not watch with me one hour?" And even this affectionate rebuke he immediately tempers with a kind excuſe for them: the ſpirit truly is willing, but the fleſh is weak."

I now proceed in the melancholy narrative. "And while he yet ſpake, lo! Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with ſwords and ſtaves, from the chief prieſts and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a ſign, ſaying, Whomſoever I ſhall kiſs, that ſame is he: hold him faſt. And forthwith he came to Jeſus, and ſaid, Hail, Maſter; and kiſſed him. And Jeſus ſaid unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they and laid hands on Jeſus, and took him."

"And behold one of them which were with Jeſus (St. Peter) ſtretched out his hand, and drew his ſword, and ſtruck a ſervant of the high prieſt, (whoſe name was Malchus) and ſmote off his ear." Here again we ſee the warmth and vehemence of Peter's temper, which prompted him to a well-meant, though injudicious diſplay of his zeal in his Maſter's cauſe. "Then ſaid Jeſus unto him, Put up again thy ſword into its place, for all they that take the ſword ſhall periſh with the ſword. Thinkeſt thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he ſhall preſently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then ſhall the ſcripture be fulfilled, that thus it muſt be?"

From this reproof to Peter, we are not to infer that the uſe the ſword in ſelf-defence is unlawful; but that the

uſe of it againſt the *magiſtrates* and *the miniſters of juſtice* (which was the caſe in the preſent inſtance) is unlawful. It was meant alſo to check that propenſity, which is but too ſtrong and too apparent in a large part of manking, to have recourſe to the ſword on *all* occaſions; and more particularly to reſtrain private perſons from avenging private injuries, which they ſhould rather leave to the magiſtrate or to God; "for vengeance is mine, I will repay, ſaith the Lord*." In all ſuch caſes, they who take the ſword unjuſtly and raſhly will probably, as our Saviour here forewarns them, periſh with the ſword; with the ſword of their adverſary, or of the magiſtrate. That denunciation might alſo allude to the Jews, who now ſeized on Jeſus; and might be meant to intimate to his diſciples, that it was perfectly needleſs for them to draw their ſwords on theſe miſcreants, ſince they would all periſh at the ſiege or capture of Jeruſalem by the ſword of the Romans.

If it had been the intention of Providence to protect Jeſus and his religion by force, there is no doubt but a hoſt of angels would have been ſent to defend him, as one was actually ſent to comfort him. But this would have defeated the very purpoſe for which he came into world, which was, that he ſhould "make his ſoul an offering for ſin†." The prophets foretold (more particularly Iſaiah and Daniel) that he ſhould do ſo. And beſides this, nothing could be more abhorrent, from the ſpirit of his religion, than force, violence, and bloodſhed. Theſe inſtruments of deſtruction he left to fanatics and impoſtors. The only weapons he made uſe of were of a different nature; the ſword of the ſpirit, the ſhield of faith, and the armour of righteouſneſs.

"In that ſame hour ſaid Jeſus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as againſt a thief with ſwords and ſtaves, for to take me; I ſat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me. But all this was done that the ſcriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled; which, as I have already obſerved, predicted his ſufferings and

* Rom. xii. 19. † Iſaiah, liii. 10.

Extr
natura
four
and
op
ed
t
all his disciples forsook him and fled."
the exact completion of that prophecy,
just before delivered, that all his disciples
should be offended because of him; that is, should desert
him this very night. And that this prediction was so
literally accomplished, is clear beyond all controversy; because it
was a circumstance which the disciples would for their own credit
gladly have suppressed, if they durst. By recording this
circumstance they recorded their own weakness, their own pusil-
lanimity. And we may be perfectly sure that they would
not have invented a falsehood on purpose to perpetuate their own
disgrace. We have therefore, in this incident, a demon-
strative proof, both that our Lord's prophecy was actual-
ly fulfilled, and that the evangelists were men of the strict-
est veracity and integrity, who were determined to sacri-
fice every thing, even their own reputation, to the sacred
cause of truth.

Jesus being now in the possession of his enemies, they that had laid hold on him led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. But Peter, though he had fled with the rest, yet ashamed of his cowardice, and still really attached to his Master, summoned up for the moment resolution enough to turn back and follow the croud (but with cautious and trembling steps) to the palace of the high priest, "and went in, and sate with the servants in the hall of the palace, to see the end. Now the chief priests and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus to put him to death, but found none; yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none." Their object was to put Jesus to death; and for this purpose they sought out for false witnesses, to charge him with a *capital* crime. To condemn any one to death their own law required two witnesses; and it was also necessary for them to produce evidence sufficient to induce the Roman governor to ratify their sentence, without which it was of no avail. There was no difficulty in finding out and suborning false witnesses in abundance, who were perfectly well disposed to conform to their wishes; but for a long time they found none whose evidence came up to the point they aimed at; none who could prove against Jesus a capital offence. But at

length "came two false witnesses, and said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days." Now to speak disrespectfully, or to prophecy against the temple, was considered by the Jews as *blasphemy*, and of course a capital offence. But the truth was that Jesus said no such thing. The expressions alluded to by the witnesses were those he spoke, when, after casting the buyers and sellers out of the temple, the Jews asked him what sign he could give them of his authority to do these things? His answer was, not as the witnesses stated it, "I am able to destroy this temple;" but it was, "destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." So St. John expressly tells us*; and also, that by this temple he meant his own body, to which he probably pointed at the time. The high priest, sensible, perhaps, that even this evidence would not completely answer his purpose, proceeds to interrogate our Saviour, hoping that he might be drawn by artful questions to condemn himself. He arose therefore, and said unto Jesus, "Answerest thou nothing? What is it that these witness against thee?" Is it true, or is it false? and what have you to say in your own defence? But Jesus held his peace. He disdained to make any answer to such unfounded and contemptible accusations. He saw that his judges were predetermined; that every thing he could say would be of no avail; and that the only proper part for him to take, was to observe a dignified silence. The high priest perceiving this, had recourse to a measure which he knew must compel our Lord to speak; "I adjure thee, says he, by the living God, that thou tell us, whether thou be the Christ the Son of God." This calling upon a man to swear by the living God was called the oath of adjuration, and was the Jewish mode of administering an oath either to a witness or a criminal; and when so adjured, they were obliged to answer. Jesus now therefore conceived himself bound in conscience to break his silence, and said to the high priest, "Thou hast said;" that is, thou hast said what is true, I *am* the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God; for all these were synonomus terms among the Jews. But as our Lord's actual appear-

* Chap. ii. 19.

nance and situation did but ill accord with a character of such high dignity, he proceeds to assure his judges, that what he affirmed was nevertheless unquestionably true; and that they themselves should in due time have the fullest proof of it. For, says he, "hereafter ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." Sitting at the right hand of power means sitting at the right hand of God, to whom the Jews sometimes gave the appellation of *power*; and *coming in the clouds of heaven*, was with the Jews a characteristic mark of the Messiah. And the whole passage relates not to the final judgment, but to the coming of Christ to execute vengeance on the Jews in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. "Then the high priest rent his clothes, (a mark of extreme horror and indignation) saying, he hath spoken blasphemy, by declaring himself the Christ, the Son of God, and assuming all the marks of divine power. What further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye? They answered and said, he is guilty of death;" guilty of a crime that deserves death. "Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands, saying, Prophesy unto us; who is he that smote thee?"

Such were the indignities offered to the Lord of all, by his own infatuated creatures; and although he could with one word have laid them prostrate at his feet, yet he bore all these insults without a single murmur or complaint, and never once spake unadvisedly with his lips. "Though he was reviled, he reviled not again; though he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously*."

The evangelist now resumes the history of St. Peter, who, while these things were transacting in the council-room, sate without in the palace; and a damsel came unto him saying, "Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee.—But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest. And when he was come out into the porch,

* 1 Pet. ii. 23.

another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow also was with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man. And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them, for thy speech betrayeth thee. Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the words of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out and wept bitterly."

This most interesting story is related by all the evangelists, with a few immaterial variations in each; but the substance is the same in all. There is however one circumstance added by St. Luke, so exquisitely beautiful and touching, that it well deserves to be noticed here.—He tells us that after Peter had denied Jesus thrice, "immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew; *and the Lord turned and looked upon Peter**." What effect that look must have had on the heart and on the countenance of Peter, every one may, perhaps, in some degree conceive; but it is utterly impossible for any words to describe, or, I believe, even for the pencil of a Guido to express†.—The sacred historian therefore most judiciously makes no attempt to work upon our passions or our feelings by any display of eloquence on the occasion. He simply relates the fact, without any embellishment or amplification; and only adds, "and Peter remembered the words of the Lord, how he had said unto him, before the cock crow thou shalt deny me thrice; and he went out and wept bitterly."

The reflections that croud upon the mind from this most affecting incident of Peter's denial of his master, are many and important; but I can only touch, and that slightly, on a few.

The first is, that this event in the history of St. Peter is a clear and a striking accomplishment of our Saviour's

* Ch. xxii. 61.

† In fact, I cannot learn that any great master has ever yet selected this incident as the subject of a picture.

prediction, that before the cock crew he ſhould deny him thrice. And it is very remarkable that there are in this ſame chapter no leſs than four other prophecies of our Lord, which were all punctually fulfilled, ſome of them like this, within a few hours after they were delivered.

The next obſervation reſulting from the fall of Peter is the melancholy proof it affords us of the infirmity of human nature, the weakneſs of our beſt reſolutions, when left to ourſelves, and the extreme danger of *confiding* too much in our own ſtrength.

That St. Peter was moſt warmly attached to *Jeſus*, that his intentions were upright, and his profeſſions at the moment ſincere, there can be no doubt. But *his temper* was too hot, and his confidence in himſelf too great.—When our Lord told him, and all the other apoſtles, that they would deſert him that night, Peter was the firſt to ſay to him, "though all men ſhould be offended becauſe of thee, yet will I *never* be offended." And when Jeſus again aſſured him, that before the cock crew he ſhould deny him thrice, Peter inſiſted with ſtill greater vehemence on his unſhaken fidelity, and declared, "that though he ſhould die with him, he ſhould never deny him." Yet deny him he did, with execrations and oaths; and left a memorable leſſon even to the beſt of men, not to entertain too high an opinion of their own conſtancy and firmneſs in the hour of temptation. "Let him that thinketh he ſtandeth, take heed leſt he fall."

And hence in the laſt place we ſee the wiſdom and the neceſſity of looking beyond ourſelves, of looking up to heaven for ſupport and aſſiſtance in the diſcharge of our duty. If, when Peter was firſt forewarned by our Lord of his approaching denial of him, inſtead of repeating his profeſſions of inviolable fidelity to him, he had with all humility confeſſed his weakneſs, and implored his divine Maſter to ſtrengthen and fortify him for the trial that awaited him, the event probably would have been very different. And it is ſurprizing that he had not learned this leſſon from his former experience. For when, confiding as he did now in his own courage, he entreated

Jeſus to let him walk to him upon the ſea, and was permitted to do ſo; no ſooner did he find the wind boiſterous than he was afraid, and beginning to ſink, he cried out, "Lord, ſave me. And immediately Jeſus ſtretched forth his hand and caught him." This was a plain intimation to him, (as I remarked in a former Lecture) that it was not his own arm that could help him, but that Almighty hand, and that outſtretched arm, which then preſerved him; and to which, when in danger, we muſt all have recourſe to preſerve us from ſinking. "Truſt then in the Lord," (as the wiſe king adviſes), "with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own underſtanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he ſhall direct thy paths*."

* Prov. iii. 5.

LECTURE XXII.

MATTHEW xxvii.

IN the preceding chapter we saw that the chief priests and elders had, in their summary way, without the shadow of justice, without any consistent evidence, decided the fate of Jesus, and pronounced him guilty of death. Their next care was how to get this sentence confirmed and carried into execution; for under the Roman government they had not at this time the power of the sword, the power of life and death; they could not *execute* a criminal, though they might try and condemn him, without a warrant from the Roman governor; they determined therefore to carry him before Pilate, the Roman procurator of Judæa at that time. But then, to ensure success in that quarter, it was necessary to give their accusations against Jesus such a colour and shape, as should prevail upon the governor to put him to death. For this purpose they found it expedient to change their ground, for they had condemned him for blasphemy; but this they knew would have little weight with a pagan governor, who, like Gallio, would "care for none of those things" which related solely to religion. They therefore resolved to bring him before Pilate as a *state prisoner*, and to charge him with treasonable and seditious practices; with setting himself up as a king in opposition to Cæsar, and persuading the people not to pay tribute to that prince. Accordingly we are told in the beginning of this chapter, that "when morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took council against Jesus to put him to death;" that is, to obtain *permission* to put him to death; "and when they had bound him they led him away, and dilivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor."

The evangelist, having brought the history of this diabolical transaction thus far, makes a short digression, to

inform us of the fate of that wretched traitor Judas, who had by his perfidy brought his Maſter into this ſituation.

"Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he ſaw that he was condemned, repented himſelf, and brought again the thirty pieces of ſilver to the chief prieſts and elders, ſaying, I have ſinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they ſaid. What is that to us? See thou to that. And he caſt down the pieces of ſilver in the temple, and went and hanged himſelf."

From the expreſſion made uſe of in the third verſe, "when Judas ſaw that Jeſus was condemned, he *repented himſelf*," ſome commentators have thought that he did not imagine or expect that Jeſus would be condemned to death; but ſuppoſed either that he would convey himſelf away from his perſecutors, or that he would prove his innocence to the ſatisfaction of his judges; or that at the moſt ſome ſlight puniſhment would be inflicted upon him. One would not wiſh to load even the worſt of men with more guilt than really belongs to them; but, from conſidering the character of Judas, and comparing together all the circumſtances of the caſe, it appears to me more probable that the acquittal or condemnation of Jeſus never entered into his contemplation. All he thought of was gain. He had kept the common purſe, and had robbed it; and his only object was, how to obtain a ſum of money, which he determined to have at all events, and left conſequences to take care of themſelves. But when he ſaw that his divine Maſter, whom he knew to be perfectly innocent, was actually condemned to death, his conſcience then flew in his face; his guilt roſe up before him in all its horrors. The innocence, the virtues, the gentledeſs, the kindneſs of his Lord, with a thouſand other circumſtances, ruſhed at once upon his mind, and painted to him the enormity of his crime in ſuch dreadful colours, that he could no longer bear the agonizing tortures that racked his ſoul, but went immediately and deſtroyed himſelf.

The anſwer of the chief prieſts to Judas, when he brought back to them the thirty pieces of ſilver, and de-

clared that he had betrayed the innocent blood, was a perfectly natural one for men of their character; "What is that to us? See thou to that." Men who had any feeling, any ſentiments of common humanity, or even of common juſtice, when ſo convincing a proof of the accuſed perſon's innocence had been given them, would naturally have relented, would have put an immediate ſtop to the proceedings, and releaſed the priſoner. But this was very far from entering into their plan. With the guilt or innocence of Jeſus they did not concern themſelves. This was not their affair. All they wanted was the deſtruction of a man whom they hated and feared, and whoſe life and doctrine were a ſtanding reproach to them. This was their object: and as to the mercy or the juſtice of the caſe, on this head they were at perfect eaſe; What is that to us? See thou to that." And yet to ſee the aſtoniſhing inconſiſtence of human nature, and the ſtrange contrivances by which even the moſt abandoned of men endeavour to ſatisfy their minds and quiet their apprehenſions; theſe very men, who had no ſcruple at all in murdering an innocent perſon, yet had wonderful qualms of conſcience about putting into the treaſury the money which they themſelves had given as the "*price of blood!*" "The chief prieſts took the ſilver pieces, and ſaid, it is not lawful for us to put them into the treaſury, becauſe it is the price of blood. And they took counſel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury ſtrangers in. Wherefore that field was called The Field of Blood, unto this day. Then was fulfilled that which was ſpoken by Jeremy the prophet, ſaying, And they took the thirty pieces of ſilver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Iſrael did value, and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me*."

* It happens that this paſſage in found not in Jeremiah, to which the evangeliſt refers, but in the eleventh chapter of Zechariah. But there are various very ſatisfactory ways in which learned men have accounted for this difficulty; which after all, as the prophecy actually exiſts, is a matter of no moment; and in writings two or three thouſand years old, it is no great wonder if, by the careleſſneſs of tranſcribers, one name ſhould ſometimes (eſpecially where abbreviations are uſed) be put for another.

I cannot pass on from this part of the chapter without observing, that the short account here given us of Judas Iscariot affords us a very striking proof of the perfect innocence and integrity of our Lord's character, and of the truth of his pretentions.

Had there been any thing reprehensible in the former, or any deceit in the latter, it must have been known to Judas Iscariot. He was one of the twelve who were the constant companions of our Saviour's ministry, and witnesses to every thing he said or did. If therefore his conduct had been in any respect irregular or immoral; if his miracles had been the effect of collusion or fraud; if there had been any plan concerted between him and his disciples to impose a false religion upon the world, and under the guise of piety, to gratify their *love of fame*, honor, wealth, or power; if, in short, Jesus had been either an enthusiast or an impostor, Judas must have been in the secret; and when he betrayed his Master, would immediately have divulged it to the world. By such a discovery, he would not only have justified his own treachery, but might probably have gratified also his ruling passion, his love of money. For there can be no doubt, that when the chief priests and rulers were industriously seeking out for evidence against Jesus, they would most gladly have purchased that of Judas at any price, however extravagant, that he chose to demand. But instead of producing any evidence *against* Jesus, he gives a voluntary and most decisive evidence in his favor. "I have sinned," says he, in an agony of grief; "I have sinned, and have betrayed the innocent blood." This testimony of Judas is invaluable, because it is the testimony of an unwilling witness; the testimony, not of a friend but of an enemy; the testimony, not of one desirous to favor and to befriend the accused, but of one who had actually betrayed him. After such an evidence as this, it seems impossible for any ingenuous mind either to question the reality of our Saviour's miracles, or the divinity to which he laid claim; because, as Judas declared him *innocent* (which he could not be, had he in any respect *deceived* his disciples) he must have been, what he assumed to be, the Son of God, and his religion the word of God.

After this account of Judas Iscariot, the evangelist proceeds in the history.

"And Jesus *stood before the governor.*" Little did that governor imagine who it was that then stood before him. Little did he suspect that he must himself one day stand before the tribunal of that very person, whom he was then going to judge as a criminal!

It appears from the parallel place in St. Luke (and from what was stated in the preceding Lecture,) that the charge brought against Jesus before Pilate was not what it had been before the chief priests, blasphemy, but sedition and treason. "They began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying, that he himself is Christ a king*." These were great crimes against the state, as affecting both the revenue and the sovereignty of the Roman emperor, both of which it was the duty of the governor to support and maintain. "Pilate therefore asked him, Art thou the king of the Jews? And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest." That is, I am what thou sayest. "And when he was accused of the chief priests and elders he answered nothing. Then saith Pilate unto him, Hearest thou not how many things those witness against thee? And he answered him to never a word; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly." Our Lord's conduct on this occasion was truly dignified. When he was called upon to acknowledge what was really true, he gave a direct answer both to the chief priests and to Pilate. He acknowledged that he was the Christ, the Son of God, the King of the Jews; but false and frivolous, and unjust accusations, he treated as they deserved, with profound and contemptuous silence.

It appears, however, from St. John, that although Jesus declared he was the King of the Jews, yet he explained to Pilate the nature of his kingdom, which he assured him was not of this world. And Pilate, satisfied with this explanation, and seeing clearly that the whole

* Luke xxiii. 2.

accuſation was malicious and groundleſs, made ſeveral efforts to ſave Jeſus. He repeatedly declared to his accuſers, that having examined him, he could find no fault in him. This, however, inſtead of diſarming their fury, only inflamed and increaſed it. They were the more fierce, as St. Luke tells us, ſaying, "He ſtirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place*." The mention of Galilee ſuggeſted an idea to Pilate, which he flattered himſelf might ſave him the pain of condemning an innocent man. "When Pilate heard of Galilee, he aſked whether the man were a *Galilean*; and as ſoon as he knew that he belonged to Herod's juriſdiction, he ſent him to Herod†. That tyrant, who was delighted to ſee Jeſus, and was probably very well diſpoſed to treat him as he did his precurſor, John the Baptiſt, yet could bring no guilt home to him. *He therefore* ſent him back to Pilate, inſulted and derided, but uncondemned. Pilate, not yet diſcouraged, had recourſe to another expedient, which he hoped might ſtill preſerve a plainly guiltleſs man. It was the cuſtom at the great feaſt of the paſſover for the Roman governor to gratify the Jewiſh people, by pardoning and releaſing to them any priſoner whom they choſe to ſelect out of thoſe that were condemned to death. Now there *happened* to be at that time a notorious criminal in priſon, named Barabbas, who had been guilty of exciting an inſurrection, and committing murder in it. Pilate thinking it impoſſible that the people could carry their malignant rage againſt Jeſus ſo far as to deſire the pardon of a murderer rather than of him, ſaid unto them, "Whom will ye that I releaſe unto you, Barabbas, or Jeſus which is called Chriſt?" Had the people been left to their own unbiaſſed feeling, one would think that they could not have heſitated one moment in their choice. But they were under the influence of leaders (as they generally are) more wicked than themſelves. For we are told, that "the chief prieſts and elders *perſuaded* the multitude that they ſhould aſk Barabbas, and deſtroy Jeſus‡."

While this was paſſing an extraordinary incident took place, which muſt needs have made a deep impreſſion on

* Luke xxiii. 5. † Luke xxiii. 6, 7. ‡ Matth. xxvii. 20.

the mind of Pilate. "When he was ſat down upon the judgment-ſeat, his wife ſent unto him, ſaying, Have thou nothing to do with that juſt man; for I have ſuffered many things this day in a dream becauſe of him." Anxious as Pilate already was to ſave Jeſus, this ſingular circumſtance coming upon him at the moment, muſt have greatly quickened his zeal in ſuch a cauſe. He therefore redoubled his efforts to carry his point, and again ſaid to the Jews, "Whether of the twain will ye that I releaſe unto you? They ſaid, Barabbas. Pilate ſtill perſiſted, What ſhall I do then with Jeſus which is called CHRIST?" that is, the Meſſiah, the great deliverer whom they expected; thinking this conſideration might ſoften them. But he was miſtaken; they all ſay unto him, "Let him be crucified." Once more he endeavored to move their compaſſion, by reminding them of the perfect innocence of Jeſus. The governor ſaid unto them, "Why? what evil hath he done?" But even this laſt affecting remonſtrance was all in vain: they cried out the more, ſaying, "Let him be crucified." When therefore Pilate ſaw that he could prevail nothing, but rather a tumult was made, he took water, and waſhed his hands before the multitude, ſaying, "I am innocent of the blood of this juſt perſon; ſee ye to it." This was a cuſtom both among the Jews and the Romans, when they wiſhed to exculpate themſelves from the guilt of having put to death an innocent man. We meet with inſtances of this ſignificant ablution in ſeveral claſſic writers*. The Moſaic law itſelf enjoined it in certain caſes†; and it is in alluſion to this ceremony that David ſays in the Pſalms, "I will waſh my hands in innocency, O Lord; (that is, in teſtimony of my innocence) and ſo will I go to thine altar‡."

This therefore was at once a viſible declaration of the innocence of Jeſus, and of Pilate's reluctance in condemn-

* Sophocles-Ajax, iii. 1. v. 664, and Scholiaſt in Loco. So Æneas, after having recently ſlaughtered ſo many of his enemies at the ſacking of Troy by the Greeks, durſt not touch his houſehold gods, till he had waſhed himſelf in the running ſtream.

Me bello è tanto digreſſum et cæde recenti,
Attreſtare nefas; donec me flumine vivo
Abluero.——Æn. l. ii. v. 718.

† Deut. xxi. 6, 7. ‡ Pſalm xxvi. 6.

ing him. To this the Jews made that answer, which might petrify every heart with horror. Then answered all the people, and said, "*His blood be upon us, and on our children.*" Then released he Barabbas unto them. And when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified."

Here let us pause a moment and look back to the scene we have been contemplating, and the reflections that arise from it.

It affords, in the first place, a most awful warning to the lower orders of the people, to beware of giving themselves up, as they too frequently do, to the direction of artful and profligate leaders, who abuse their simplicity and credulity to the very worst purposes, and make use of them only as tools, to accomplish their own private views of ambition, of avarice, of resentment, or revenge.—We have just seen a most striking instance of this strange propensity of the multitude to be misled, and of the ease with which their passions are worked up to the commission of the most atrocious crimes. The Jewish people were naturally attached to Jesus. They were *astonished* at his miracles, they were charmed with his discourses; and their diseases and infirmities were relieved by his unremitting benevolence. But notwithstanding all this, by the dexterous management of their chief priests and elders, their admiration of Jesus was converted in a moment into the most rancorous hatred; they were *persuaded* to ask the life of a murderer in preference to his; and to demand the destruction of a man who had never offended them, whose innocence was as clear as the day, and was repeatedly acknowledged and strongly urged upon them by the very judge who had tried him.

Yet even that judge himself, who was so thoroughly convinced of the innocence of his prisoner, and actually used every means in his power to preserve him, even he had not the honesty and the courage to protect him effectually; and his conduct affords a most dreadful proof what kind of a thing public justice was among the most *enlightened*, and (if we may believe their own poets and historians) the most *virtuous* people in the ancient heathen world.

Here he a Roman governor sent to dispense justice in a Roman province, and invested with full powers to save or to destroy; we see him with a prisoner before him, in whom he repeatedly declared he could find no fault: and yet, after a few ineffectual struggles with his own conscience, he delivers up that prisoner, not merely to death, but to the most horrible and excruciating torments that human malignity could devise. The fact is, he was afraid of the people, he was afraid of Cæsar; and when the clamorous multitude cried out to him, "if thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend," all his firmness, all his resolution at once forsook him. He shrunk from the dangers that threatened him, and sacrificed his conscience and his duty to the menaces of a mob, and the dread of sovereign power.

Could any thing like this have happened in this country? We all know that it is impossible. We all know that no dangers, no threats, no fears, either of Cæsar or of the people, could ever induce a British judge to condemn to death a man, whom he in his conscience believed to be innocent. And what is it that produces this difference between a Roman and a British judge? It is this: that the former had no other principle to govern his conduct but natural reason, or what would now be called philosophy; which, though it would sometimes point out to him the path of duty, yet could never inspire him with fortitude enough to persevere in it in critical and dangerous circumstances; in opposition to the frowns of a tyrant, or the clamours of a multitude. Whereas the British judge, in addition to his natural sentiments of right and wrong, and the dictates of the moral sense, has the principle of *religion* also to influence his heart: he has the unerring and inflexible rules of evangelical rectitude to guide him; he has that which will vanquish every other fear, the *fear of God*, before his eyes. He knows that he himself must one day stand before the Judge of all; and *that* consideration keeps him firm to his duty, be the dangers that surround him ever so formidable and tremendous.

This is one, among a thousand other proofs, of the benefits we derive, even in the present life, from the Christian

revelation. It has, in fact, had a moſt ſalutary and beneficial influence on our moſt important *temporal* intereſts. Its beneficent ſpirit has ſpread itſelf through all the different relations and modifications of human ſociety, and communicated its kindly influence to almoſt every public and private concern of mankind. It has not only purified, as we have ſeen, the adminiſtation of juſtice; but it has inſenſibly worked itſelf into the inmoſt frame and conſtitution of civil ſocieties. It has given a tinge to the complexion of their governments, and to the temper of their laws. It has ſoftened the rigour of deſpotiſm, and leſſened, in ſome degree, the horrors of war. It has deſcended into families, has diminiſhed the preſſure of private tyranny, improved every domeſtic endearment, given tenderneſs to the parent, humanity to the maſter, reſpect to ſuperiors, to inferiors ſecurity and eaſe; and left, in ſhort, the moſt evident traces of its benevolent ſpirit in all the various ſubordinations, dependencies, and connections of ſocial life.

But to return to the Roman governor. Having thus baſely ſhrunk from his duty, and, contrary to his own conviction, condemned an innocent man, *he endeavored* to clear himſelf from this guilt, and to ſatisfy his conſcience, by the vain ceremony of waſhing his hands before the multitude, and declaring, "that he was innocent of the blood of that juſt perſon." Alas! not all the water of the ocean could waſh away the foul and indelible ſtain of murder from his ſoul. Yet he hoped to transfer it to the accomplices of his crime. "See ye to it," ſays *he* to the people. And what anſwer did that people make to him? "*His blood*, ſaid they, *be on us and on our children.*" A moſt fatal imprecation, and moſt dreadfully fulfilled upon them at the ſiege of Jeruſalem, when the vengeance of heaven overtook them with a fury unexampled in the hiſtory of the world; when they were expoſed at once to the horrors of famine, of ſedition, of aſſaſſination, and the ſword of the Romans. And it is very remarkable, that there was a ſtriking correſpondence between their crime and their puniſhment. They put Jeſus to death when the nation was aſſembled to celebrate the paſſover; and when the nation was aſſembled for the ſame purpoſe, Titus ſhut them up within the walls of Jeruſalem. The

rejection of the true Meſſiah was their crime, and the following of falſe Meſſiahs to their deſtruction was their puniſhment. They bought Jeſus as a ſlave; and they themſelves were afterwards ſold and bought as ſlaves, at the loweſt prices. They preferred a robber and murderer to Jeſus, whom they crucified between two thieves; and they themſelves were afterwards infeſted with bands of thieves and robbers. They put Jeſus to death leſt the Romans ſhould come and take away their place and nation; and the Romans *did* come and take away their place and nation*. And what is ſtill more ſtriking, and ſtill more ſtrongly marks the judgment of God upon them, they were puniſhed with that very kind of death which they were ſo eager to inflict on the Saviour of mankind, the death of the croſs; and that in ſuch prodigious numbers, that Joſephus aſſures us there wanted wood for croſſes, and room to place them in†.

The hiſtory then proceeds as follows: "Then releaſed he Barabbas unto them; and when he had ſcourged Jeſus, he delivered him to be crucified." It was the cuſtom of the inhuman Romans to ſcourge their criminals before they crucified them; as if the exquiſite tortures of crucifixion were not ſufficient without adding to them thoſe of the ſcourge. But in this inſtance the Roman ſoldiers went further ſtill; they improved upon the cruelty of their maſters, and to torments they added the moſt brutal mockery and inſult. "Then the ſoldiers of the governor took Jeſus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of ſoldiers; and they ſtripped him, and put on him a ſcarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand; and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, ſaying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they ſpit upon him, and took the reed, and ſmote him on the head. And after they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to be crucified." One haſtens over this ſcene of inſolence and outrage with averted eyes, and can hardly bring one's mind to believe that any thing in

* Newton on Prophecy, vol. ii. p. 355.
† De Bell. Jud. l. v. c. xi. p. 1247. Ed. Huds.

the shape of man could have risen to this height of human barbarity. What a difference between the treatment of an innocent and injured man, to that of the vilest criminal in this country previous to his execution; and how strongly does it mark the difference between the spirit of Paganism and the spirit of Christianity! "And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name, him they compelled to bear his cross." It was usual for criminals to bear their own cross; but when they were feeble (as the blessed Jesus might well be after all his bitter sufferings) they compelled some one to bear it for him; and this Cyrenian was probably known to be a favourer of Christ. "And when they were come to a place called Golgotha, they gave him *vinegar* to drink, mingled with gall;" a kind of stupefying potion, intended to abate the sense of pain, and to hasten death. "And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, "They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots." This is a prediction of king David's, in the 22d Psalm. "And sitting down, they watched him there; and set up over him his accusation, *written, This is Jesus, the King of the Jews*; for in extraordinary cases it was usual to place such inscriptions over the criminal; but with regard to this, a remarkable circumstance occurred. We learn from St. John, that many of the Jews read this inscription, which gave them infinite offence; as being a declaration to all the world that Jesus really *was* their king. The chief priests therefore came to Pilate, and begged of him to alter the inscription; and instead of writing, "This *is* the King of the Jews," to write, "He *said* I am the King of the Jews." Pilate, who put up this inscription out of mockery, now retained *it, like* a true Roman, out of obstinacy. "What I have written (says he, peevishly) I have written; and it *shall* stand;" unconscious of what he was saying, and of his being overruled all the while by an unseen hand, which thus compelled him to bear an undesigned testimony to a most important truth; that the very man whom he had crucified as a malefactor, did not merely *say* that he was the king of the Jews, the true Messiah, but that he really *was* so.

"Then were two thieves crucified with him, the one on the right hand, the other on the left." This was done with a view of adding to the ignominy of our Saviour's sufferings. But this act of malignity, like many other instances of the same nature, answered a purpose which the authors of it little thought of or intended. It was the completion of a prophecy of Isaiah, in which, alluding to this very transaction, he says of the Messiah, "he was numbered with the transgressors*." They then continued their insults upon him, even while hanging in agony upon the cross, as we find related in the five following verses: We are then told, that "from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour." The sixth hour of the Jews corresponds to our twelve o'clock, and their ninth hour of course to our three. There was therefore a darkness over all the earth, from twelve at noon till three in the afternoon. This darkness must have been supernatural and miraculous. It could not be an eclipse of the sun, because that cannot happen but in the new moon; whereas this was at the feast of the Passover, which was always celebrated at the full moon. It is taken notice of by several ancient writers, both Heathen and Christian; and Tertullian expressly declares, that it was mentioned in the Roman archives†. From whence it appears, that it was not confined to the land of Judea, but extended itself, as it is expressed by St. Luke, *over all the earth*‡.

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is to say, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" We are not from hence to imagine, that Jesus meant by these words to express any distrust of God's favor and kindness towards him, or any apprehension that the light of his countenance was withdrawn from him. This was impossible. He well knew, that under the load of affliction which for the salvation of mankind, he voluntarily took upon himself, he was still his heavenly Father's "beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased." These expressions therefore of seeming despondence, were nothing more

* Isaiah, liii. 12. † Tertull. Apol. c. 21. ‡ Luke, xxiii. 44.

than the natural and almoſt unavoidable effuſions of a mind tortured with the acuteſt pain, and hardly conſcious of the complaints it uttered; of which many ſimilar inſtances occur in the Pſalms. Indeed theſe words themſelves are the beginning of the 22d Pſalm, which perhaps our Lord recited throughout, or at leaſt undoubtedly meant to apply the whole of it to himſelf. And this very Pſalm, although in the outſet it breaths an air of dejection and complaint, yet ends in expreſſing the firmeſt truſt in the mercy and the protection of God. And our Lord himſelf, when he breathed his laſt, committed himſelf with boundleſs confidence to the care of the Almighty. "Father, into thy hands I commend my ſpirit*."

Then ſome of them that ſtood there, when they heard him crying out "Eli, Eli," deceived by the ſimilitude of the ſound, ſaid "This man calleth for Elias. And ſtraitway one of them ran, and took a ſponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink." This as St. John tells us, was done in conſequence of Jeſus ſaying, "I thirſt." The reſt ſaid, "Let be; let us ſee whether Elias will come to ſave him." "Jeſus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, gave up the ghoſt." This was about the ninth hour, or three in the afternoon. And as he was crucified at the third hour, or at nine in the morning, he had hung no leſs than ſix hours in agonies upon the croſs. And this, let it never be forgotten, was for us men, and for our ſalvation! "And behold the veil of the temple was rent in twain, from the top to bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the ſaints which ſlept, aroſe and came out of the graves after his reſurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many."

Such were the convulſions into which the whole frame of nature was thrown, when the Lord of all yielded up his life.

The veil of the temple, we are told, in the firſt place, was rent in twain, from the top to the bottom.

* Luke, xxiii. 46.

The Jewiſh temple was divided into ſeveral parts; the moſt ſacred was called the Holieſt, or the *Holy of Holies*, into which none but the high-prieſt might enter, and that only once in a year. It was conſidered as a type of heaven; and was ſeparated from what was called the holy place, or the place where divine worſhip was celebrated, by a curtain of rich tapeſtry, which is here called the vail of the temple. This vail, when our Saviour expired, was rent in twain, from the top to the bottom; by which was ſignified the abolition of the whole Moſaic ritual, the removal of the partition between Jew and Gentile, and the admiſſion of the latter (on the terms of the Goſpel covenant) into heaven, or the *Holy of Holies*. "And the earth did quake, and the rocks rent." This earthquake is mentioned by heathen authors as having, in the reign of Tiberius, deſtroyed twelve cities in Aſia*. "And the graves were opened, and many bodies of the ſaints which ſlept aroſe, and came out of the graves after his reſurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many." Who the holy perſons were which then aroſe from their graves muſt be matter of mere conjecture; but moſt probably ſome of thoſe who had believed in Chriſt, ſuch as old Simeon, and whoſe perſons were known in the city.

Now when the centurion, and they that were with him watching Jeſus, ſaw the earthquake, and thoſe things that were done, they feared greatly, ſaying, "Truly this man was the Son of God."

The centurion here mentioned was the Roman captain, who, with a guard of ſoldiers, was ordered to attend the crucifixion of Jeſus, and ſee the ſentence executed. He placed himſelf, as St. Mark informs us, over againſt Jeſus. From that ſtation he kept his eye conſtantly fixed upon him, and obſerved with attention every thing he ſaid or did. And when he ſaw the meekneſs, the patience, the reſignation, the firmneſs, with which our Lord endured the moſt excruciating torments; when he heard him at one time fervently praying for his murderers, at another

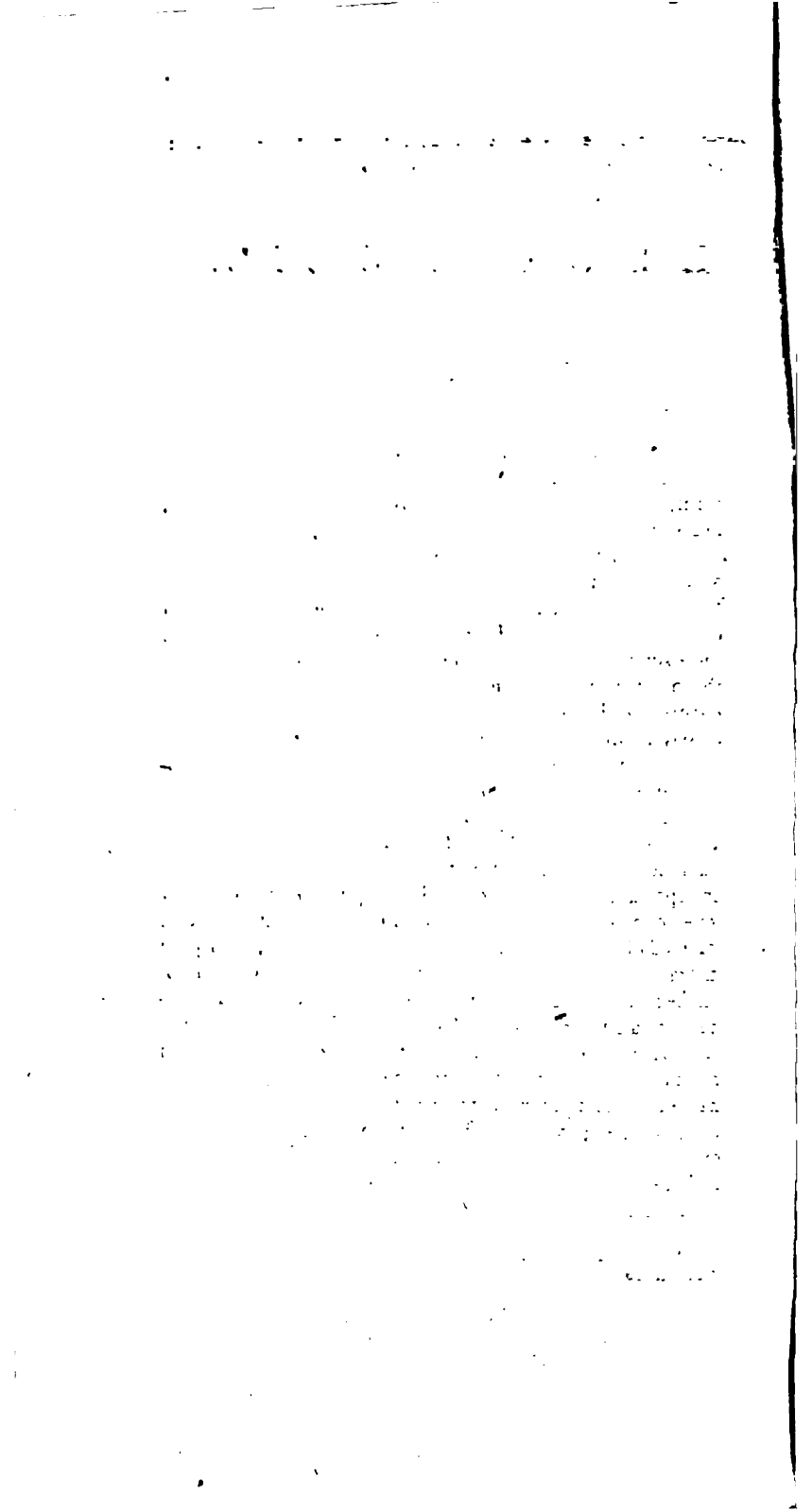
* Taciti Annal. l. ii. c. 47. Suet. in Tib. vi. 448. Plin. Nat. Hiſt. l. ii. c. 84.

diſpoſing with dignity and authority of a place in paradiſe to one of his fellow ſufferers; and at length, with that confidence which nothing but conſcious virtue and conſcious dignity could at ſuch a time inſpire, recommending his ſpirit into the hands of his heavenly Father; he could not but conclude him to be a moſt extraordinary perſon and ſomething more than human. But when moreover he obſerved the aſtoniſhing events that took place when Jeſus expired; the agitation into which the whole frame of nature ſeemed to be thrown; the ſupernatural darkneſs, the earthquake, the rending of rocks, the opening of graves; he then burſt out involuntarily into that ſtriking exclamation, "Truly this was the Son of God."

Here then we have a teſtimony to the divine character of our Lord, which muſt be conſidered as in the higheſt degree impartial and incorrupt: the honeſt unſolicited teſtimony of a plain man, a ſoldier and a heathen; the teſtimony, not of one who was prejudiced in favour of Chriſt and his religion, but of one, who, by habit and education, was probably ſtrongly prejudiced againſt them.

And it is not a little remarkable, that the contemplation of the very ſame ſcene which ſo forcibly ſtruck the Roman centurion, has extorted a ſimilar confeſſion from one of the moſt eloquent of modern ſceptics, who has never been accuſed of too much credulity, and who, though he could bring himſelf to reſiſt the evidence both of prophecy and of miracles, and was therefore certainly no bigot to Chriſtianity, yet was overwhelmed with the evidence ariſing from the character, the ſufferings, and the death of Jeſus. I allude to the celebrated compariſon between the death of Socrates and the death of Jeſus, drawn by the maſterly pen of Rouſſeau. The paſſage is probably well known to a large part of this audience; but it affords ſo forcible and ſo unprejudiced a teſtimony to the divinity of Chriſt, and bears ſo ſtriking a reſemblance to that of the centurion, that I ſhall be pardoned, I truſt, for bringing it once more to your recollection, and introducing it here as the concluſion of this Lecture.

"Where, (ſays he,) is the man, where is the philoſopher, who can act, ſuffer, and die, without weakneſs and without oſtentation? When Plato deſcribes his imaginary juſt man, covered with all the opprobrium of guilt, yet at the ſame time meriting the ſublimeſt rewards of virtue, he paints preciſely every feature in the character of Jeſus Chriſt. The reſemblance is ſo ſtriking that all the fathers have obſerved it, and it is impoſſible to be deceived in it. What prejudice, what blindneſs muſt poſſeſs the mind of that man, who *dares* to compare the ſon of Sophroniſcus with the Son of Mary! What a diſtance is there between the one and the other! The death of Socrates philoſophizing calmly with his friends, is the moſt gentle that can be wiſhed; that of Jeſus expiring in torments, inſulted, derided, and reviled by all the people, the moſt horrible that can be imagined. Socrates taking the poiſoned cup, bleſſes the man who preſents it to him; and who, in the very act of preſenting it, melts into tears. Jeſus, in the midſt of the moſt agonizing tortures, prays for his enraged perſecutors. Yes, if the life and death of Socrates are thoſe of a ſage, the life and death of Jeſus are thoſe of a GOD."



LECTURE XXIII.

MATTHEW xxvii.—xxviii.

IN the preceding Lecture we closed the dismal scene of our Lord's unparalleled sufferings; on which it is impossible to reflect without astonishment and horror, and without asking ourselves this question, Whence came it to pass that so innocent, so excellent, so divine a person as the beloved Son of God, in whom he was well pleased, should be permitted by his heavenly Father to be exposed to such indignities and cruelties, and finally to undergo the exquisite torments of the cross? The answer is, that the occasion of all this is to be sought for in our own sinful nature, in the depravity and corruption of the human heart, in the extreme wickedness of every kind which overspread the whole world at the time of our Lord's appearance upon earth, and which must necessarily have subjected the whole human race to the severest effects of the Divine displeasure, had not some atonement, some expiation, some satisfaction to their offended Maker, been interposed between them and the punishment so justly due to them. This expiation, this atonement, the Son of God himself voluntarily consented to become, and paid the ransom required for our deliverance by his own death upon the cross. "He gave himselfe for us, as the Scriptures express it, an offering and a sacrifice to God. He was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. He suffered for sin, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; with his stripes we were healed. In his own blood he washed us from our sins; in his own body he bore our sins upon the tree, that we being dead unto sin might live unto righteousness*." This is that great doc-

* Ephes. v. 2. Rev. xiii. 8. 1 Pet. iii. 18. Isa. liii. 5. Rev. i. 5. 1 Pet. ii. 24.

trine of REDEMPTION, which is so fully explained and so strongly insisted on in various parts of the sacred writings, which forms so essential a part of the Christian system, and is the grand foundation of all our hopes of pardon and acceptance at the great day of retribution.

This mode of vicarious punishment, this substitution of an innocent victim in the room of an offending person, can be no surprise to any one that reflects on the well known practices of animal sacrifices for the expiation of guilt, which prevailed universally, not only among the Jews, but throughout the whole heathen world; and which evidently proves it to have been the established opinion of mankind, that (as the apostle expresses it) "without blood there could be no remission*."

Still it must be acknowledged, that in the stupendous work of our redemption, there is something far beyond the power of our limited faculties to comprehend.

That the Son of God himself should feel such compassion for the human race, for the wretched *inhabitants of* this small spot in the vast system of the universe, as voluntarily to undertake the great and arduous and painful task of rescuing them from sin and misery, and eternal death; that for this purpose he should condescend to quit the bosom of his Father and the joys of heaven; should divest himself of the glory that he had before the world began; should not only take upon himself the nature of man but the form of a servant; should submit to a low and indigent condition, to indignities, to injuries and insults, and at length to a disgraceful and excruciating death, is indeed a mystery, but it is a mystery of *kindness* and of mercy; it is, as the apostle truly calls it, "a love that passeth knowledge†;" a degree of tenderness, pity, and condescension, to which we have neither words nor conceptions in any degree equal. It is impossible for us not to cry out on this occasion with the Psalmist, "Lord, what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the Son of man, that thou visitest him‡?"

* Heb. ix. 22. † Ephes. iii. 19. ‡ Psalm viii. 4.

But what effect should this reflection have upon our hearts? Should it dispose us to join with the disputer of this world in doubting or denying the wisdom of the Almighty in the mode of our redemption, and in quarrelling with the means he has made use of to save us, because they appear to our weak understanding strange and unaccountable? Shall the man who is sinking under a mortal disease, refuse the medicine which shall infallibly restore him, because he is ignorant of the ingredients of which it is composed? Shall the criminal who is condemned to death, reject the pardon that is unexpectedly offered to him, because he cannot conceive in what manner and by what means it was obtained for him? Shall we who are all criminals in the sight of God, and are all actually (till redeemed by Christ) under the sentence of death; shall we strike back the arm that is graciously stretched out to save us, merely because the mercy offered to us is so great that we are unable to grasp with our understanding the whole nature and extent of it? Shall the very magnitude, in short, of the favor conferred upon us be converted into an argument against receiving it; and shall we determine not to be saved, because God chuses to do it, not in our way, but his own? That our redemption by Christ is a mystery, a great and astonishing mystery, we readily acknowledge. But this was naturally to be expected in a work of such infinite difficulty as that of rendering the mercy of God in pardoning mankind, consistent with the exercise of his justice, and the support of his authority, as the moral Governor of the world. Whatever could effect this must necessarily be something far beyond the comprehension of our narrow understandings; that is, must necessarily be mysterious. And therefore this very circumstance, instead of shocking our reason, and staggering our faith, ought to confirm the one, and satisfy the other.

After the crucifixion of our Lord follows the account of his burial by Joseph of Arimathea, who went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus; and having obtained it, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and de-

parted. On this I shall make no other observation, than that it was the exact fulfilment of a prophecy in Isaiah, where, speaking of the promised Messiah, or Christ, it is said, "he shall make his grave with the rich*." And accordingly Joseph, we are told, was a rich man, and an honourable counsellor†.

Now the next day that followed the day of the preparation (that is on the Saturday) the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, "Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, after three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night and steal him away, and say unto the people, he is risen from the dead; so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch, go your way, make it as sure as ye can. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch‡."

Here we see the chief priests using every possible precaution to prevent a fraud. For this purpose they went to Pilate to beg for a guard, immediately after our Lord was buried. It is indeed here said that they went *the next day that followed the day of the preparation*, the day on which Jesus was crucified. This looks, at the first view, as if the sepulchre had remained one whole night without a guard. But this was not so. The chief priests went to Pilate as soon as the sun was set on Friday, the day of the preparation and crucifixion; for then began the following day, or Saturday; as the Jews always began to reckon their day from the preceding evening. They had a guard therefore as soon as they possibly could, after the body was deposited in the sepulchre; and one cannot help admiring the wisdom of Providence in so disposing events, that the extreme anxiety of these men, to prevent collusion, should be the means of adding the testimony of sixty unexceptionable witnesses (the number of the Roman soldiers on guard) to the truth of the resurrection, and of establishing the reality of it beyond all power of contradiction. It is only

* Isaiah, liii. 9. † Matth. xxvii. 57. Mark, xv. 43.
‡ Matth. xxvii. 62—66.

neceſſary to add on this head, that the circumſtance of ſealing the ſtone was a precaution of which ſeveral inſtances occur in ancient times, particularly in the prophecy of Daniel, where we read, that when Daniel was thrown into the den of lions, a ſtone was brought and laid upon the mouth of the den, and the king ſealed it with his own ſignet, and with the ſignet of his lords, that the purpoſe might not be changed concerning Daniel*.

The chief prieſts having taken theſe precautions, waited probably with no ſmall impatience for the third day after the crucifixion, when Jeſus had foretold that he ſhould riſe again, but when they made no doubt that they ſhould find the body in the ſepulchre, and convict him of deceit and impoſture.

On the other hand, it might naturally be imagined that the diſciples, after having received from their Lord repeated aſſurances that he would riſe on the third day from the dead, would anxiouſly look for the arrival of that day, with a certain confidence that theſe promiſes would be fulfilled, and that they ſhould ſee their beloved Maſter reſcued from the grave, and reſtored to life.

But this ſeems to have been by no means the real ſtate of their minds. It does not appear that they entertained any hopes of Jeſus's reſurrection. Shocked and confounded, and diſmayed at finding him condemned to the ignominious death of the croſs, they forgot every thing he had ſaid to them reſpecting his riſing again. When therefore he was led to puniſhment, they all forſook him and fled. Moſt of them ſeem to have kept themſelves concealed during the whole time of Jeſus being in the grave, and to have given themſelves up to ſorrow and deſpair. They had not even the courage or the curioſity to go to the ſepulchre on the third day to ſee whether the promiſed event had taken place or not. When two of them going to Emmaus met Jeſus, their converſation plainly ſhewed that they were diſappointed in their expectations. "We truſted (ſaid they) that it had been he which ſhould have delivered Iſrael†."

* Daniel, vi. 17. † Luke xxiv. 21.

and when the women who had been at the ſepulchre told the apoſtles that Jeſus was riſen, "their words ſeemed to them as *idle tales*, and they believed them not*."

The women, it is true, came to the ſepulchre early in the morning of the third day; but they came to embalm the dead body, and of courſe not with the hopes of ſeeing a living one.

So far then is perfectly clear, that the diſciples were not at all diſpoſed to be *over credulous* on this occaſion. Their prejudices and prepoſſeſſions lay the contrary way; and nothing but the moſt irreſiſtible evidence would be able to convince them of a fact, which they appeared to think in the higheſt degree improbable.

Let us now then ſee what this evidence of the reſurrection was. In the beginning of the 28th chapter, on which we are now entering, St. Matthew informs us, "that in the end of the ſabbath, as it began to dawn towards the firſt day of the week; that is, according to our way of reckoning, very early on the Sunday *morning* (our Lord having been crucified on the Friday) came Mary Magdalen and the other Mary, the mother of James and Joſes, to ſee the ſepulchre, and (as we learn from the other evangeliſts,) they brought with them the ſpices they had purchaſed to embalm the body of Jeſus. And behold there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord deſcended from heaven, and came and rolled back the ſtone from the door, and ſate upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as ſnow. And for fear of him the keepers did ſhake, and became as dead men. And the angel anſwered, and ſaid unto the women, Fear not ye; for I know that ye ſeek Jeſus which was crucified. He is not here; for he is riſen, as he ſaid. Come, ſee the place where our Lord lay; and go quickly, and tell his diſciples that he is riſen from the dead; and behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there ye ſhall ſee him. Lo! I have told you. And they departed from the ſepulchre with fear and great joy, and

* Luke xxiv. 11.

did run to bring his disciples word. And as they went to tell his disciples, behold Jesus met them, saying, *All hail*; and they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. Then said Jesus unto them, be not afraid. Go, tell my brethren, that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me*."

This is the relation given by St. Matthew of our Lord's first appearance, after his resurrection, to the women who came to the sepulchre. The accounts given by the other three evangelists are substantially the same, though differing in a few minute circumstances of no moment, which however have been very ably reconciled by many learned men. I shall therefore wave all discussions of this kind, and confine myself to the main fact of the resurrection, in which all the evangelists agree, and of which the proofs are numerous and clear.

The principal and most obvious are those which arise from the various appearances which Jesus made after his resurrection to various persons, and at various times.

The first was to Mary Magdalen alone†.

The second, to her in company with several other women, as we have just seen‡.

The third, to Peter§.

The fourth, to the two disciples going to Emmaus‖.

The fifth, to the apostles in Jerusalem, when they were assembled with the doors shut on the first day of the week; at which time he shewed them his hands and his feet, pierced with the nails, and did eat before them¶.

The sixth, to the apostles a second time as they sate at meat, when he satisfied the doubts of the incredulous Thomas, by making him thrust his hand into his side**.

* Matth. xxviii. 1—10.
† Mark. xvi. 9.
‡ Matth. xxviii. 9.
§ 1 Cor. xv. 5.
‖ Luke, xxiv. 13.
¶ John, xx. 19. Luke, xxiv. 37—43.
** John, xx. 26.

The seventh, to Peter and several of his disciples at the lake of Tiberias, when he also ate with them*.

The eighth, and last, was to above five hundred brethren at once†.

There are then no less than eight distinct appearances of our Lord to his disciples after his resurrection, recorded by the sacred historians. And can we believe that all those different persons could be deceived in *these* appearances of one, whose countenance, figure, voice, and manner, they had for so long a time been perfectly well acquainted with; and who now, not merely presented *himself* to their view transiently and silently, but ate and drank and conversed with them, and suffered *them to touch and* examine him thoroughly, that they might be convinced by all their senses that it was truly their beloved Master, and not a spirit that conversed with them. In all this surely it is impossible that there could be any delusion or imposition. Was it then a tale invented by the disciples to impose upon others? Why they should do *this it is not* easy to conceive; because it would have been an imposition, not only on others, but on themselves. It would have been an attempt to persuade themselves that their Master was risen when he really was not, from whence no possible benefit could arise to them, but, on the contrary, grief, disappointment, and mortification in the extreme. But besides this, the narratives themselves of this great event bear upon the very face of them the strongest marks of reality and truth. They describe, in so natural a manner, the various emotions of the disciples on their first hearing of our Lord's resurrection, that no one who is acquainted with the genuine workings of the human mind, can possibly suspect any thing like fraud in the case.—When the women were first told by the angels that Christ was risen, and were ordered to tell the disciples, they departed quickly from the sepulchre *with fear and great joy*‡; with joy at the unexpected good news they had just heard; and with fear, not only from the sight of the angel, but lest the glad tidings he had told them should not prove true.

* John, xxi. 1. † 1 Cor. xv 6. ‡ Matth. xxviii. 8.

They therefore "trembled, and were amazed, and ran to bring the disciples word; neither said they any thing to any man, for they were afraid*." And when they told these things to the apostles, their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not†. When Jesus himself appeared to the apostles at Jerusalem, they were terrified and affrighted, and thought they had seen a spirit; and they believed not for joy, and wondered‡. When he appeared again unto the eleven as they sat at meat, they were so incredulous that he upbraided them with their unbelief§; and Thomas would not be convinced without thrusting his hand into his side‖. This certainly was not the behaviour of men who were fabricating an artful story to impose upon the world, but of men who were themselves astonished, and overpowered with an event which they did not in the least expect, and which it was with the utmost difficulty they could be brought to believe.

The account therefore of the resurrection, given by the evangelists, may safely be relied upon as true.

It may however be said, that this account is the representation of friends, of those who were interested in asserting the reality of a resurrection; but that there is probably another story told by the opposite party, by the Jews and the Romans, which may set the matter in a very different point of view; and that before we can judge fairly of the question, we must hear what these have to say upon it as well as the evangelists. This is certainly very proper and reasonable. There *is*, we acknowledge, another account given by the Jews respecting the resurrection of Christ; and to shew the perfect fairness and impartiality of the sacred historians, and how little they wish to shrink from the severest investigation of the truth, they themselves tell us what this opposite story was. In the 11th verse of this chapter, St. Matthew informs us, "that as the women were going to tell the disciples that Jesus was risen, behold, some of the watch came into the

* Mark, xvi. 8. † Luke, xxiv. 11.
‡ Luke, xxiv. 37—41. § Mark, xvi. 14.
‖ John, xx. 27.

city, and ſhewed unto the chief prieſts all the things that were done. And when they were aſſembled with the elders, and had taken counſel, they gave large money unto the ſoldiers, ſaying, Say ye, his diſciples came by night, and ſtole him away while we ſlept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will perſuade him, and ſecure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught. And this ſaying is commonly reported among the Jews unto this day."

This then is the ſtatement of our adverſaries, produced in oppoſition to that of the evangeliſts, which the latter ſimply relate without any obſervation upon it, without condeſcending to make the ſlighteſt anſwer to it, but leaving every man to judge of it for himſelf. And this indeed they might ſafely do; for it is a fabrication too groſs and too palpable to impoſe on any man of common ſenſe. If any perſon can bring himſelf to believe that ſixty Roman ſoldiers ſhould be all ſleeping at the ſame time on guard; that they ſhould be able to tell what was done in their ſleep; that they ſhould have the boldneſs to confeſs that they ſlept upon their poſt, when they *knew* the puniſhment of ſuch an offence to be death; and that the diſciples ſhould be ſo devoid of all common ſenſe as to ſteal away a dead body, which could not be of the ſmalleſt uſe to them, and inſtead of proving a reſurrection, was a ſtanding proof againſt it; if any man, I ſay, can prevail on himſelf to liſten for a moment to ſuch abſurdities as theſe, he may then give credit to the tale of the ſoldiers; but otherwiſe muſt treat it, as it truly deſerves, with the moſt ſovereign contempt.

This ſenſeleſs forgery then being ſet aſide, and the body of Jeſus being gone, and yet *never having been produced* by the Jews or Romans, there remains only the alternative of a *real reſurrection*.

But beſides the poſitive proofs of this fact which have been here ſtated, there is a preſumptive one of the moſt forcible nature, to which I have never yet ſeen any anſwer, and am of opinion that none can be given. The proof I allude to is that which is drawn from the ſudden and aſton-

ishing change which took place in the language and the conduct of the apoſtles, immediately after the period when they affirmed that Jeſus had riſen from the dead. From being, as we have ſeen, timorous and dejected, and diſcouraged at the death of their Maſter, they ſuddenly became courageous, undaunted, and intrepid: and they boldly preached that very Jeſus, whom before they had deſerted in his greateſt diſtreſs. This obſervation will apply, in ſome degree, to all the apoſtles; but with regard to St. Peter more particularly it holds with peculiar force.

One of the moſt prominent features in the character of St. Peter (a character moſt admirably pourtrayed by the evangeliſts) is timidity of diſpoſition. We ſee it in the terror that ſeized him when he was walking on the ſea; we ſee it in his deſerting his divine Maſter when he was apprehended; then turning back to follow him, but following at a diſtance; not daring to go into the council chamber when he was examined, but ſtaying in the outer court with the ſervants; and at length, when he was challenged as one of his diſciples, denying three times with the moſt dreadful oaths and imprecations, that he knew any thing of him, or had the ſlighteſt connexion with him.

This is the point of view in which St. Peter preſents himſelf to us juſt before our Lord's crucifixion.

Turn now to the fourth chapter of the Acts, and ſee what his language *then* was after Jeſus had actually been put to death.

He and John having healed the lame man whom they found ſitting at the gate of the temple, were apprehended, and thrown into priſon, and the next day were called upon to anſwer for their conduct before the high prieſt, and the other chief rulers of the Jews. And upon being queſtioned by what power and by what name they had performed this miraculous cure, Peter anſwered them in theſe reſolute terms. "Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Iſrael, if we be this day examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole, be it known unto you all, and to all the people of

Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought by you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other. For there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved*." And when, soon after this, Peter and John were straitly threatened, and commanded not to speak at all, or teach in the name of Jesus, they answered and said unto them, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you rather than unto God, judge ye; for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard†."

What now is this that we hear? Is this the man who, but a short time before, had shamefully renounced his divine Master, and declared, with the utmost vehemence and passion, that he was utterly unknown to him? And does this same man now, after the crucifixion of his Lord, and when he himself was a prisoner, and had reason to expect a similar fate, does this man boldly tell those in whose power he was, that by the name of this very Jesus he had healed the lame man? Does he dare to reprove them with having crucified the Lord of life? Does he dare to tell them that God had raised him from the dead; that there was no other name under heaven by which they could be saved; and that, in defiance of all their interdictions and all their menaces, he must and would still continue to speak what he had seen and heard?

In what manner shall we account for this sudden and astonishing alteration in the language of St. Peter? There is, I will venture to assert, no other possible way of accounting for it, but from that very circumstance which St. Peter himself mentions in his speech to the high priest, namely, "that he whom they had crucified was, by the almighty power of God, raised from the dead‡." It was this change in the condition of his divine Master, which produced a correspondent change in the character and conduct of St. Peter. It was this miracle of our Lord's res-

* Acts, iv. 8. 12. † Acts, iv. 18. 20. ‡ Acts, iv. 10.

urrection, which could alone have produced the almoſt equally aſtoniſhing miracle of St. Peter's complete tranſformation. Had Jeſus never riſen from the dead, as he had repeatedly promiſed to do, he would have been a deceiver and an impoſtor; and that St. Peter, knowing this, ſhould openly and boldly profeſs himſelf his diſciple when *dead*, after having moſt peremptorily denied him and diſclaimed all knowledge of him when *living*, and ſhould expoſe himſelf to the moſt dreadful dangers in aſſerting a fact which he knew to be falſe, and for the ſake of a man who had moſt cruelly deceived and diſappointed him, is a ſuppoſition utterly repugnant to every principle of human nature, and every dictate of common ſenſe, and an abſurdity too groſs for the moſt determined infidel to maintain.

We have here then one more proof, in addition to all the reſt, of the reſurrection of Chriſt, intelligible to the loweſt, and convincing to the moſt improved underſtanding. And that this was the great deciſive fact which operated ſo ſurprizing a revolution in the mind of St. Peter, is ſtill further confirmed by the ſtreſs which he himſelf laid upon it, in his anſwer to the high prieſt, and by the conſtant appeal which he and all the other apoſtles made to this argument, in preference to every other; for we are told that "with great power gave the apoſtles witneſs of the *reſurrection* of the Lord Jeſus, and great grace was upon them all*." And St. Paul goes ſo far as to make the belief of this ſingle article the main ground and baſis of our ſalvation. "If thou ſhalt confeſs with thy mouth the Lord Jeſus, and ſhalt believe in thine heart that God hath raiſed him from the dead, thou ſhalt be ſaved†."—The reaſon of this is, becauſe the belief of the reſurrection of Chriſt unavoidably leads to the belief of the whole Chriſtian religion, to the truth of which God ſet his ſeal, by raiſing the author of it from the dead: and the belief of the Chriſtian revelation, if genuine and ſincere, will, with the bleſſing of God on our own ſtrenuous exertions, produce all thoſe Chriſtian graces and virtues, which, through the merits of our Redeemer, will render our final calling and election ſure.

* Acts, iv. 33. † Rom. x. 9.

The reſurrection of Chriſt being thus eſtabliſhed on the firmeſt grounds, the concluſions to be drawn from it are many and important; but I ſhall at preſent confine myſelf to two of them; which ſeem more particularly to deſerve our notice.

The firſt is, that this great event of the reſurrection affords a clear and deciſive proof that Jeſus was what he pretended to be, THE SON OF GOD; that the religion he taught came from God; that conſequently every doctrine he delivered ought to be believed, every command he gave to be obeyed, and that every thing he promiſed or threatened will certainly come to paſs. For had not his pretenſions been well founded, and his religion true, it is impoſſible that the God of truth could have *given them* the ſanction of his authority, by raiſing him from the dead. But by doing this, he gave the ſtrongeſt poſſible atteſtation to the reality of his divine miſſion.

The next inference from this fact is, that the reſurrection of Chriſt is an earneſt, a pledge, and a proof of our own. He had promiſed his diſciples, "that where he was, there ſhould they be alſo:" And the ſcriptures in numberleſs places aſſure us, that we ſhall riſe again from the grave, and become immortal. Now theſe promiſes receive the ſtrongeſt confirmation from his reſurrection, which ſhows, in the moſt ſtriking and ſenſible manner, that our bodies are *capable* of being raiſed to life again, and that God will actually re-animate them, as he did that of Jeſus. In this our Saviour acted conformably to the ſpirit and genius of his religion, and to his conſtant method of teaching, which was, to inſtruct mankind by facts rather than by words. It was his intention (and thanks be to God that it was) that our faith ſhould ſtand, not in the wiſdom or eloquence of man, but in the demonſtration of the ſpirit and of power. He went about therefore, not only preaching the word, but doing good, doing good miraculouſly, making the principles and the evidences of his religion palpable to the ſenſes of mankind. When John ſent to know whether he was the expected Meſſiah or no, Jeſus, inſtead of entering into a long and laboured proof of his divinity, took the more

compendious and convincing way of proving his point, by performing in that inſtant many miraculous cures, and then referring the Baptiſt to what his meſſengers had ſeen and heard.* In the very ſame manner, in the preſent inſtance, the aſſurance he gave us of our reſurrection was not ſpeculative and argumentative, but practical and viſible. A thouſand objections might have been formed by the faſhionable philoſophers of that age againſt the poſſibility of reſtoring breath to a dead body, and raiſing it alive again from the grave. Our Lord could very eaſily have ſhown, by unanſwerable arguments, the futility and abſurdity of any ſuch objections. But the diſputers of this world would have cavilled and objected without end. And therefore, to put an effectual ſtop to all ſuch idle controverſy, and to convince all the world that it was not a thing *incredible* that God ſhould raiſe the dead, he himſelf roſe again from the grave, and became the firſt fruits of them that ſlept. He triumphed over death, he threw open the gates of everlaſting life; and whoever treads in his ſteps as nearly as they can through life, ſhall follow him through death into thoſe bleſſed regions where he is gone before to prepare a place for ſuch as love and imitate him. "For if the ſpirit of him who raiſed up Jeſus from the dead dwell in you, he that raiſed up Chriſt from the dead ſhall alſo quicken your mortal bodies by his ſpirit that dwelleth in you†."

Since then we have ſuch expectations and ſuch hopes, what manner of perſons ought we to be in all holy converſation and godlineſs? The ancient heathen might ſay, the unbelieving libertine may ſtill ſay, let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die; let us enjoy, without reſerve, and without meaſure, all the pleaſures which this world affords, for to-morrow we may leave it, and we know of no other. But how abſurd would it be for the *Chriſtian* to ſay this, how mad would it be for him to act accordingly, when he knows, that though to-morrow his ſoul may be ſeparated from his body, yet that they will be again united, and live for ever in a future ſtate of exiſtence? What an amazing difference does this fact make in our circumſtances, and how inexcuſable ſhall we be, if it does not pro-

* Matth. xi. 4. † Rom. viii, 11.

duce a ſuitable difference in our conduct! Even the *poſſibility* of ſuch an event muſt have a powerful influence over our mind and manners; what then muſt be the caſe when it amounts, as it does with every ſincere believer in the Goſpel, to *abſolute certainty?* With what cheerfulneſs ſhall we acquieſce under poverty and misfortunes, when we reflect, that if we bare them patiently, and hold faſt our integrity, theſe light afflictions, which are but for a moment, ſhall work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory! With what indifference ſhall we contemplate the charms of wealth and power, with what horror ſhall we turn away from the pleaſures of ſin, which are but for a ſeaſon, when we know that the one *may*, and the other moſt certainly *will*, cut us off from an eternal and invaluable inheritance.

Suppoſe yourſelves for a moment in ſome foreign kingdom, where, after having been obliged to ſpend many years, you are at length ſuffered to return to your own country. Suppoſe further, that in this country you have left families that are infinitely dear to you, friends whom you exceedingly love and eſteem, wealth and honors to the utmoſt extent of your wiſhes. When, with the moſt impatient longings after all theſe bleſſings, you ſet out upon your return to your native land, will any allurements that you meet with on the road tempt you from your main object? Will any accidental hardſhips or inconveniencies deter you from purſuing your journey? Will you not break through all obſtructions, reſiſt all temptations, and preſs forwards with alacrity and vigour towards your beloved home? And why then will you not ſeek your *heavenly* country with the ſame ardour and perſeverance that you would your *earthly* one? You are all "ſtrangers and pilgrims upon earth." This world is not your home, though you are too apt to think it ſo. You belong to another city, you are ſubjects of a better kingdom, where infinitely greater joys await you than have been juſt deſcribed, or can by the utmoſt ſtretch of imagination be conceived. Every day you live, every moment you breath, brings you nearer to this country; and the grave itſelf, diſmal as it appears, is nothing more than the gate that leads you into it.

Conſcious then of the dignity and importance of our high and heavenly calling, which renders us candidates for the kingdom of God, and heirs of immortality, let us perſevere ſteadily and uniformly, in our progreſs towards thoſe celeſtial manſions, which are prepared for all the faithful ſervants of Chriſt; where we ſhall be releaſed from all the endleſs anxieties, the vain hopes, and cauſeleſs fears that now agitate and diſquiet us; and ſhall, through the merits of our Redeemer, be rewarded, not merely with uninterrupted tranquility and repoſe, (the utmoſt felicity of the pagan elyſium); not merely with a viſionary poſthumous reputation, which commences not till we are incapable of enjoying it; but with a crown of glory that fadeth not away, a *real* immortality in the kingdom of our Father and our God.

LECTURE XXIV.

MATTHEW xxviii.

THE laſt Lecture ended with the hiſtory *of our* Lord's reſurrection. The evangeliſt then proceeds to give a conciſe account of what paſſed after that great event had taken place.

"Then, ſays he, the eleven diſciples went *away into* Galilee, into a mountain, where Jeſus had appointed them*."

By the eleven diſciples he means the apoſtles, who, though originally twelve, were now reduced to eleven, by the defection and death of Judas. Theſe Jeſus had commanded to meet him in Galilee. "Go, tell my brethren, ſays he to the women, that they go into Galilee, and there ſhall they ſee me." There therefore the apoſtles went about eight days after the reſurrection, and many others with them; for this probably was the time and the place when he ſhewed himſelf to about five hundred brethren at once. "And when they ſaw him they worſhipped him; but ſome doubted." Here we have the authority of the apoſtles themſelves for the worſhip of Chriſt. The women, when they firſt ſaw Jeſus, paid him the ſame adoration; "they came and held him by the feet, and worſhipped him†." But ſome, it is added, doubted. And where can be the wonder, if among five hundred perſons there ſhould be two or three, who, like the diſciples mentioned by St. Luke‡, believed not for joy, and wondered; that is (as is very natural) were afraid to believe what they ſo ardently wiſhed to be true; or who, like St. Thomas, would not believe, unleſs they touched the body of Jeſus, and thruſt their hands into his ſides.

* Matth. xxviii. 16 † Matth. xxviii. 9. ‡ Ch. xxiv. 41.

But their doubts, like his, were probably ſoon removed. This circumſtance therefore only ſerves to ſhew the ſcrupulous fidelity of the ſacred hiſtorians, who, like honeſt men, fairly tell you every thing that paſſed on this and on ſimilar occaſions, whether it appears to make for them or againſt them.

"And Jeſus came and ſpake unto them, ſaying, all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth."

In his divine nature he had this power from all eternity; but it was now to be exerciſed in his human nature alſo, which, from a ſtate of humiliation, from *the form of a ſervant*, was ſoon to be exalted to the higheſt dignity, and placed at the right hand of God. Accordingly St. Paul informs us, that, "God raiſed our Lord from the dead, and ſet him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but in that which is to come: and put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulneſs of him that filleth all in all*." And again, in his Epiſtle to the Philippians, he ſays, that "God has highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jeſus every knee ſhould bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue ſhould confeſs that Jeſus Chriſt is Lord, to the glory of God the Father†." In the ſame magnificent language he is ſpoken of in the book of Revelations; "Worthy is the Lamb that was ſlain to receive power, and riches, and wiſdom, and ſtrength, and honor, and glory, and bleſſing. And again, Bleſſing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that ſitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever‡."

Such is the dignity of the Lord and Maſter whom we ſerve; and ſuch is that authority with which, in the two concluding verſes of this chapter, he gives his laſt command to his apoſtles: "Go ye, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the

* Ephes. i 20—23. † Philip. ii 9—11. ‡ Rev. v. 12, 13.

Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt; teaching them to obſerve all things whatever I have commanded you; and lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

The ceremony then by which our Lord's diſciples were to be admitted into his religion, was baptiſm. This was ſometimes uſed by the Jews on the admiſſion of proſelytes, and by the heathens on initiation into their myſteries. But the baptiſm of Chriſtians was to be accompanied with a peculiar form of words, which diſtinguiſhed it from every other. They were to be baptized *in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghoſt.* This form of words has accordingly been uſed in the Chriſtian church, from the earlieſt times down to the preſent; and is, as you all know, the mode of baptiſm adopted and conſtantly practiſed by the Church of England. *And it is remarkable,* not only on this account, but as being alſo one principal ground of a very diſtinguiſhed doctrine of the Goſpel, and of the Church of England, the doctrine of the Trinity. For the plain and natural interpretation of the words is, that by being baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghoſt, we are dedicated and conſecrated equally to the ſervice of each of thoſe three divine perſons; we are made the ſervants and diſciples of each, and are conſequently bound to honor, worſhip, and obey each of them equally. This evidently implies an equality in their nature, and "that all the fulneſs of the Godhead dwells in each." In confirmation of this, we find in various parts of Scripture, that all the attributes of divinity are aſcribed to each. And yet, as the unity of the Supreme Being is every where taught in the ſame Scriptures, and is a fundamental article of our religion, we are naturally led to conclude with our church in its firſt article, "That there is but one living and true God, of infinite power and wiſdom, the maker and preſerver of all things, viſible and inviſible; and that, in the unity of this Godhead, there are three perſons, of one ſubſtance, power, and eternity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghoſt."

That this is a very myſterious doctrine we do not deny; but it is not more ſo than many other doctrines of the

Chriſtian revelation, which we all admit, and which we cannot reject without ſubverting the foundation, and deſtroying the very ſubſtance and eſſence of our religion. The miraculous birth and incarnation of our bleſſed Lord, his union of the human nature with the divine, his redemption of mankind, and his expiation of their ſins by his death upon the croſs; theſe are doctrines plainly taught in Scripture, and yet as incomprehenſible to our finite underſtandings as the doctrine of three perſons and one God. But what we contend for in all theſe inſtances is, that theſe myſteries, although confeſſedly *above* our reaſon, are not *contrary* to it. This is a plain and a well-known diſtinction, and in the preſent caſe an incontrovertible one. No one for inſtance can ſay, that the ſuppoſition of three perſons and one God is contrary to reaſon. We cannot, indeed, *comprehend* ſuch a diſtinction in the divine nature; but unleſs we knew *perfectly* what that nature is, it is impoſſible for us to ſay that ſuch a diſtinction may not ſubſiſt in it conſiſtent with its unity. The truth is, on a ſubject where we have no clear ideas at all, our reaſoning faculties *muſt* fail us; and we muſt be content to ſubmit (as well we may) to the clear and explicit declarations of holy writ. It is indeed natural for the human mind to wiſh that every thing in religion ſhould be intelligible and plain, and that there ſhould be no difficulties to perplex and ſtagger our faith. But natural as this wiſh may be, is it a reaſonable one? Do we find, that in the moſt important concerns of the preſent life, in thoſe where our moſt eſſential intereſts, our property, our welfare, our health, our reputation, our very life are at ſtake, that no difficulties, no perplexities, no intricacies occur; that every thing is plain and level before us, and that we are never at a loſs how to act, what opinion to form, or what courſe to take? There are few, I fancy, here preſent, whoſe experience has not taught them, to their coſt, the very reverſe of all this. If then, even in the ordinary affairs of life, there is ſo much difficulty, doubt, and obſcurity, how can we wonder to find it in religion alſo, in thoſe enquiries that relate to an inviſible world and an inviſible Being, "to the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity*?"

* "So far is it from being true (as ſome one has ſaid) that where myſtery begins religion ends; that religion, even natural religion,

And let it never be forgotten that myſteries are not (as ſo often inſinuated, and often taken for granted) peculiar to the Chriſtian religion. They belong to *all* religions, even to that which is generally ſuppoſed to be of all others the leaſt incumbered with difficulties, pure deiſm; or, as it is ſometimes called, the religion of nature, of reaſon, or of philoſophy.

Who, for inſtance, can graſp with the utmoſt ſtretch of his underſtanding, the idea of an eternal Being; of a Being whoſe exiſtence never had any beginning, and never will have an end? Where is the man, whoſe thoughts are not loſt and confounded in contemplating the immenſity of a God, who is intimately preſent to every part of the univerſe; who ſees, with equal clearneſs, a kingdom periſh and a ſparrow fall, and to whom *every thought of our* hearts is perfectly well known* ? Who can reconcile that foreknowledge of future and contingent events, which is an unqueſtionable attribute of the Almighty, with that free-will and free agency, which are no leſs unqueſtionable properties of man? Who, in fine, can account, on the

logiue with a myſtery, with the greateſt of all myſteries, *the* ſelf-exiſtence and eternity of God. Let any one tell us how an eternity can be paſt, unleſs it was once preſent, and how that can be once preſent which never had a beginning." Seed's Sermons, v. 2. S. 7. 459.

* " J'apperçois Dieu partout dans ſes œuvres. Je le ſens en moi, je le vois tout autour de moi; mais ſitôt que je veux le contempler en lui même, ſitot que je veux chercher où il eſt, en qu'il eſt, quelle eſt ſa ſubſtance, il m'echappe, & mon eſprit troublé n' apperçoit plus rien. Rouſſeau, v. 8. p. 32. Enfin plus je m' efforce de contempler ſon eſſence infinie, moins je la conçois; *mais elle eſt*, cela me ſuffit; moins je la conçois plus je l'adore."

I have cited theſe fine paſſages from the eloquent Rouſſeau in his own language (for no tranſlation can do juſtice to them) becauſe no arguments are ſo convincing as thoſe which are drawn from the conceſſions of ſceptics themſelves, which fall from them incidentally and undeſignedly; and becauſe the ſentiments here quoted ſtand in direct contradiction to that writer's cavils in other places againſt the Chriſtian myſteries. For if notwithſtanding the difficulties which attend the contemplation of the Deity himſelf, he firmly believes his exiſtence, on what ground can he make his Savoiard vicar doubt the truth of the Goſpel on account of its myſteries† ?

† V. viii. p. 93.

principles of mere natural religion, for the introduction of natural and moral evil into the works of a benevolent Creator, whose infinite goodness must necessarily incline him to intend the happiness of all his creatures?

These considerations may serve to shew, and it might be shewn in various other cases, that it is in vain to expect an exemption from difficulty and mystery in any religion whatever. The real truth is, that not only the religion of nature, but the philosophy of nature, the works of nature, the whole face of nature, are *full* of mystery; we live and move in the midst of mystery*. And if, to avoid this, we have recourse to atheism itself, even that will be found to be more incumbered with difficulties, and to require a greater degree of *faith*, than all the religions in the world put together.

Let not then the mysteries of the Gospel ever be a rock of offence to you, or in any degree shake the constancy of your faith. They are inseparable from any religion that is suited to the nature, to the wants, and to the fallen state of such a creature as man. When once we are convinced that the Scriptures are the word of God, we are then bound to receive with implicit submission, on the sole authority of that word, those sublime truths, which are far beyond the reach of any finite understanding, but which it was natural and reasonable to expect in a revelation pertaining to that incomprehensible Being, whose "greatness is unsearchable, and whose ways are past finding out."—Let us not, in short, "exercise ourselves too much and too curiously in great matters, which are too high for us, but refrain our souls, and keep them low†. Laying aside all the superfluity of learning, and all the pride of human wisdom, let us hold fast the profession of our faith, without

* This M. Voltaire himself acknowledges, and it is a complete answer to all the objections he has made in various parts of his works to the mysteries of revelation. See *Questions sur L'Encyclopedie.* Article. *Ame.*

"The whole intellectual world is full of truths *incomprehensible*, and yet *incontestable*. Such is the doctrine of the existence of God, and such are the mysteries admitted in *Protestant* communions." Rousseau, v. 2. p. 15.

† Psalm, cxxxi. 2. 3.

wavering and without cavilling at what we cannot comprehend. Let us put ourſelves, without reſerve, into the hands of our heavenly guide, and ſubmit, with boundleſs confidence, to his direction, who, as he died to ſave us, will certainly never miſlead us. Since we *know* in whom we believe; ſince we know that the author of our religion is the Son of God, let us never forget that this gives him a right, a divine right to the obedience of our underſtandings, as well as to the obedience of our will. Let us therefore reſolutely beat down every bold imagination, every high thing that exalteth itſelf againſt the myſterious truths of the Goſpel; bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Chriſt, and receiving with meekneſs the ingrafted word, which is able to ſave our ſouls*."

Yet, however firmly we may believe all the great eſſential doctrines of the Goſpel, this alone will not enſure our ſalvation, unleſs to our faith we add obedience to all the laws of Chriſt. This we are expreſsly told in the concluding verſe of this chapter. After our Lord had preſcribed to his diſciples the form of words to be uſed in baptiſm, he adds, "teaching them to obſerve all things whatſoever I have commanded you." As this is the parting direction, the farewel injunction which Jeſus left with his diſciples juſt before he aſcended into heaven, it ſhows what peculiar ſtreſs he laid upon it. It ſhows that by making it the concluſion, the winding up as it were of his Goſpel, he meant to expreſs, in the ſtrongeſt manner, the indiſpenſable neceſſity of a holy life reſulting from a vital faith. He meant to intimate to his own diſciples, and to the miniſters of his Goſpel in every future age, that it was to be one principal object of their inſtructions, and exhortations, to inculcate all the virtues of a Chriſtian life, and an unreſerved obedience to all the precepts of their divine Maſter. And whoever neglects this branch of his duty, is guilty of manifeſting a marked contempt of the very laſt command that fell from the lips of his departing Lord.

The few words that follow this command, and which conclude the Goſpel of St. Matthew, contain a promiſe

* James, i. 21.

full of conſolation, not only to the apoſtles themſelves but to all the miniſters of the Goſpel in every ſucceeding age. "And, lo, ſays our bleſſed Lord, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." That is, although I am now about to leave you and aſcend into heaven, and can no longer be perſonally preſent with you, yet the Holy Spirit, whom I have repeatedly promiſed to ſend unto you, ſhall certainly come to ſupply my place, ſhall conſtantly abide with you, and ſhall enlighten, guide, aſſiſt, ſupport, and confort you to the end of the world.

Here ends the Goſpel of St. Matthew. But it muſt be obſerved, that in this laſt part of our Saviour's hiſtory, he has been much more conciſe than the other evangeliſts, and has paſſed over ſeveral circumſtances which they have recorded, and of which it may be proper to take ſome notice here, before we cloſe this Lecture. It appears from the other evangeliſts, and from the Acts of the Apoſtles, that Jeſus continued among his diſciples for forty days after his reſurrection, giving them repeated and infallible proofs of his being actually raiſed from the dead, and "ſpeaking to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God*."

In one of theſe diſcourſes, he took occaſion to advert more particularly to thoſe things that were written in the law of Moſes, and in the prophets, and in the Pſalms, concerning him. He ſhowed how exactly and minutely all the predictions reſpecting him contained in thoſe ſacred books were accompliſhed in his birth, his life, his doctrines, his ſufferings, his death, and his reſurrection.

This ſtamps at once a divine authority on thoſe books, and gives a ſanction to the interpretation of the paſſages alluded to, and the application of them to our bleſſed Lord, by our beſt and moſt learned expoſitors.

It is added, that on this occaſion he *opened* their underſtandings, that they might underſtand the Scriptures, and ſaid unto them, "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Chriſt to ſuffer, and riſe from the dead the third day; and

* Luke, xxiv. 44. Acts, i. 3.

that *repentance and remiſſion of ſins* ſhould be preached in his name amongſt all nations, beginning at Jeruſalem."

He entered, we ſee, at large into the great evangelical doctrines of the atonement, of the redemption of mankind by his death, of the reſurrection, of repentance, and the remiſſion of ſins through faith in his name. Theſe are moſt important topics, and his illuſtration of them to his diſciples muſt have opened to them an invaluable treaſure of divine knowledge. And as theſe doctrines are but briefly touched upon in the Goſpels, and more fully unfolded and explained in the Acts and the Epiſtles, it is highly probable that a very conſiderable part, if not the whole of what paſſed in theſe diſcourſes of our Lord to his diſciples after his reſurrection, is faithfully *preſerved* and detailed in thoſe inſpired writings. This places in a very ſtrong light the high importance of thoſe writings, and the high rank they ought to hold in our eſtimation, as forming an eſſential part of the Chriſtian ſyſtem, and completing the code of doctrines and of duties contained in that divine revelation.

It is remarkable alſo, that St. Matthew has made no mention of the concluding act of our Lord's life on earth, his aſcenſion into heaven. The reaſon of this omiſſion it is not perhaps very eaſy to aſſign, nor is it neceſſary. We know, that in ſeveral other inſtances various circumſtances are omitted by one evangeliſt which are ſupplied by the reſt, and others paſſed over by thoſe which are noticed by the former; a plain proof by the way that they did not write in concert with each other; but each related his own ſtory, and ſelected ſuch facts and events as appeared to him moſt deſerving of notice.

In the preſent caſe it is ſufficient for our ſatisfaction that the aſcenſion is related by two of the evangeliſts, St. Mark and St. Luke. The latter of theſe tells us in his Goſpel, and in the Acts, "that Jeſus led out his apoſtles (and the diſciples that were with them) to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands and bleſſed them. And it came to paſs while he bleſſed them he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven, and a cloud received him out of their ſight.

And while they looked ſtedfaſtly towards heaven, as he went up, behold, two men ſtood by them in white apparel; which alſo ſaid, Ye men of Galilee, why ſtand ye gazing up into heaven? This ſame Jeſus which is taken up from you into heaven, ſhall ſo come in like manner as ye have ſeen him go into heaven. And they worſhipped him, and returned to Jeruſalem with great joy; and were continually in the temple, praiſing and bleſſing God*."

The laſt obſervation I have to make is, that neither St. Matthew, nor any other of the evangeliſts, have given us a full and complete hiſtory of every thing that our Saviour did during the whole courſe of his miniſtry; but have only recorded the moſt important and the moſt remarkable of his tranſactions and his miracles. Beſides, therefore, the many irreſiſtible proofs we already poſſeſs of his divine wiſdom and almighty power, there are many others ſtill remaining behind which might have been produced, but which the evangeliſts did not think it neceſſary to ſpecify; for St. John, in the 20th chapter of his Goſpel, makes this remarkable declaration: "Many other ſigns truly (ſays he) did Jeſus in the preſence of his diſciples, which are not written in this book; but theſe are written, that ye might believe that Jeſus is the Chriſt the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name." God grant that this effect may be produced on all who now hear me; otherwiſe my labours, and their attendance, will have been in vain!

I have now brought theſe Lectures to a concluſion, and muſt here take my final leave of you. It was my original intention and my wiſh to have proceeded next to the Acts of the Apoſtles, which contain the hiſtory of the firſt propagation of the Chriſtian religion, and the aſtoniſhing progreſs it made through a large part of the world, by the preaching of the apoſtles and their coadjutors, after our Lord's departure into heaven: but I muſt not now venture into ſo large a field. Circumſtanced as I am, it

* Luke, xxiv. 50—53.

would be presumption in me to expect either that God would grant me time to accomplish so arduous a work, or that you would have perseverance to bear with me to the conclusion. I must here, therefore close my labors, at least in this place; and must now, for the last time, implore you to think and to meditate again and again on the important and interesting truths which have been unfolded to you in the course of these Lectures, and to form them into principles of action, and rules of conduct, for the regulation and direction of the remaining part of your lives.

In the history of our Lord, as given by St. Matthew, of which I have detailed the most essential parts, such a scene has been presented to your observation, as cannot but have excited sensations of a very serious and very awful nature in your minds. You cannot but have seen that the divine Author of our religion, is beyond comparison, the most extraordinary and most important personage, that ever appeared on this habitable globe. His birth, his life, his doctrines, his precepts, his miracles, his sufferings, his death, his resurrection, his ascension, are all without a parallel in the history of mankind. He called himself the Son of God, the Messiah predicted in the prophets, the great Redeemer and Deliverer of mankind, promised in the sacred writings, through successive ages, almost from the foundation of the world. He supported these great characters with uniformity, with consistence, and with dignity, throughout the whole course of his ministry. The work he undertook was the greatest and most astonishing that can be conceived, and such as before never entered into the imagination of man. It was nothing less than the conversion of a whole world from the grossest ignorance, the most abandoned wickedness, and the most sottish idolatry, to the knowledge of the true God, to a pure and holy religion, and to faith in him, who was THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE. He proved himself to have a commission from heaven, for those great purposes, by such demonstrations of divine wisdom, power, and goodness, as it is impossible for any fair and ingenuous, and unprejudiced mind to resist. Of all this you have seen abundant instances in the course of these Lectures:

and when all these circumstances are collected into one point of view, they present such a body of evidence, as must overpower by its weight all the trivial difficulties and objections that the wit of man can raise against the divine authority of the Gospel.

Consider in the first place, the transcendent excellence of our Lord's character, so infinitely beyond that of every other moral teacher; the gentleness, the calmness, the composure, the dignity, the integrity, the spotless sanctity of his manners, so utterly inconsistent with every idea of enthusiasm or imposture; the compassion, the kindness, the tenderness he expressed for the whole human race, even for the worst of sinners, and the bitterest of his enemies; the perfect command he had over his own passions; the temper he preserved under the severest provocations; the patience, the meekness with which he endured the cruellest insults, and the grossest indignities; the fortitude he displayed under the most excruciating torments; the sublimity and importance of his doctrines; the consummate wisdom and purity of his moral precepts, far exceeding the natural powers of a man born in the humblest situation, and in a remote and obscure corner of the world, without learning, education, languages, or books. Consider further the minute description of all the most material circumstances of his birth, life, sufferings, death, and resurrection, given by the ancient prophets many hundred years before he was born, and exactly fulfilled in him, and him only; the many astonishing miracles wrought by him in the open face of day, before thousands of spectators, the reality of which is proved by multitudes of the most unexceptionable witnesses, who sealed their testimony with their blood, and was even acknowledged by the earliest and most inveterate enemies of the Gospel. Above all, consider those two most remarkable occurrences in the history of our Lord, which have been particularly enlarged upon in these Lectures, and are alone sufficient to establish the divinity of his person and of his religion; I mean his wonderful prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, with every minute circumstance attending it; and that astonishing and well authenticated miracle of his resurrection from the grave, which was in the last

Lecture ſet before you: and when you lay all theſe things together, and weigh them deliberately and impartially, your minds muſt be formed in a very peculiar manner indeed, if they are not moſt thoroughly impreſſed with faith in the Son of God, and the Goſpel which he taught.

Taking it then for granted, that you firmly believe the Scriptures to be the Word of God, that of courſe they contain thoſe heavenly doctrines and rules of life by which you are to be guided here and ſaved hereafter; that the preſent ſcene is nothing more than a ſtate of trial and probation for another world; that all mankind muſt riſe from the grave, and ſtand before the judgment ſeat of Chriſt, to receive from his lips their final doom; and that there is NO OTHER NAME GIVEN UNDER HEAVEN BY WHICH YOU CAN BE SAVED, BUT THAT OF JESUS ONLY; no other poſſible way of eſcaping the puniſhments, or obtaining the rewards of the Chriſtian covenant, but faith in Chriſt, reliance on his merits, and an earneſt endeavor to practiſe every virtue and fulfil every duty preſcribed in his Goſpel; taking it for granted that you believe all theſe things to be true, let me then aſk you, what is the courſe of life which every wiſe man, which every man of common ſenſe, muſt feel himſelf irreſiſtibly called upon to purſue? Is it poſſible, that with ſuch awful, ſuch divine truths as theſe, deeply impreſſed upon your ſouls, you can allow yourſelves to be ſo entirely occupied with the various purſuits of this life, as to exclude, I will not ſay all *thought* (for that is impoſſible) but all ſerious ſolicitude concerning your future and eternal deſtiny? Are there any delights that this world has to offer, that can compenſate for the loſs of heaven? Some of you have perhaps run your career of power, of pleaſure, of gaiety, of luxury, of glory, and of fame, and can tell the true amount, the real value of theſe enjoyments. Say then honeſtly, whether any one of them has anſwered your expectations: whether they have left your minds perfectly content and ſatisfied; whether they have proved ſo ſolid, ſo durable, ſo perfect, as to be worth purchaſing at the expence of eternal happineſs? I will venture to abide by your anſwer. Truſt then to your own experience, and be no longer the dupes of illuſions which have ſo long miſled you. And if you have any feeling, any

pity for the young, the thoughtleſs, and the inexperienced; let them profit by the inſtructions, the ſalutary leſſons you are ſo well qualified to give them; let your *warning voice* reſtrain them from ruſhing headlong into thoſe errors, into which you have perhaps been unfortunately betrayed. Tell them (for you know it to be true,) that whatever flattering proſpects the world may preſent to their ardent imaginations at their firſt entrance into life, there is no ſolid ground for permanent comfort and content of mind, but a conſcientious diſcharge of their duty to God and man, an anxious endeavor to recommend themſelves to the favor of the Almighty, and a hope of pardon and acceptance through the merits of their Redeemer. Theſe alone can ſmooth the path of life and the bed of death; theſe alone can bring a man peace at the laſt.

Reflections ſuch as theſe muſt, in all times, and under all circumſtances, operate moſt powerfully on every conſiderate mind; but they receive tenfold weight from the peculiar complexion of the preſent period, and the awful ſituation into which, by the diſpenſations of Providence, we are now caſt. Never ſince the world began were ſuch tremendous proofs held up to the obſervation of mankind, of the ſlender and precarious tenure on which we hold every thing that we deem moſt valuable in the preſent life, as have been of late preſented to our view. Look around you for a moment; conſider what has been paſſing on the continent of Europe for the laſt ten years, and then ſay, what is there left for you in this world worthy of your attention, on the poſſeſſion of which, for any length of time, you can with any degree of ſecurity rely? You muſt have been very inattentive obſervers indeed, not to have perceived that all the great objects of human wiſhes, rank, power, honor, dignity, fame, riches, pleaſures, gaieties, all the pomp, and pride, and ſplendor, and luxury of life, may, when you leaſt think of it, contrary to all expectation and all probability, be ſwept away from you in one moment, and you yourſelves thrown as it were a miſerable wreck on ſome deſert ſhore, not only without the elegancies and the comforts, but even without the common neceſſaries of life. That this is no imaginary repreſentation you all know too well; you ſee too many melancholy proofs of it in thoſe

unfortunate exiles, who have taken refuge in this country; many of whom have experienced, in the utmoſt extent, the very calamities I have been here deſcribing; and who, but a few years ago, had as little reaſon to expect ſuch a dreadful reverſe of fortune as any one who now hears me.

It is true, indeed, that hitherto we have been moſt wonderfully preſerved by a kind Providence from thoſe miſeries that have deſolated the reſt of Europe, and have maintained a noble, though a bitter conflict, during many years, for our religion, our liberty, our independance, our unrivalled conſtitution, and every thing that is dear and valuable to man. But it muſt at the ſame time be admitted, that we are ſtill in a moſt critical and doubtful ſituation, and that our final ſucceſs muſt principally depend on that to which we have a *thouſand* times owed our preſervation, the favor and protection of heaven.

The rapid the aſtoniſhing, the unexampled viciſſitudes, which have repeatedly taken place during the whole of this arduous conteſt, moſt clearly ſhew, that there is ſomething in it more than common, ſomething out of the ordinary courſe of human affairs, ſomething which baffles all conjecture and all calculation, and which all the wiſdom of man cannot comprehend or control. What then, *is* this ſomething, what *is* this ſecret and inviſible agent, which ſo evidently over-rules every important event in the preſent convulſed ſtate of the world, and ſo frequently confounds the beſt conſerted projects and deſigns? Is it fate, is it neceſſity, is it chance, is it fortune? Theſe, alas! we all know, are mere names, are mere unmeaning words, by which we expreſs our total ignorance of the true cauſe. That cauſe *can* be nothing elſe than the hand of that omnipotent Being, who firſt created and ſtill preſerves the univerſe; who is "the governor among the nations, and ruleth unto the ends of the earth." To make *him* then our friend is of the very laſt importance; and it highly behoves us to conſider, *whether* we have hitherto taken the right way to make him ſo. The anſwer to this queſtion is, I fear, to be found in the unfavorable aſpect of affairs abroad, and the ſevere diſtreſſes ariſing from unpropitious ſeaſons at home, which too plainly

shew that the hand of the Almighty is upon us, that we are a sinful people, and He an offended God*.

Let it not however be imagined, that I am here holding the language of despondency and despair; no, nothing can be farther from my thoughts. But in the present calamitous situation of this country, this glorious and still unrivalled country, to which all our hearts are bound by a thousand indissoluble ties, it would have been unpardonable in me to have passed over with unfeeling apathy and cold indifference those awakening and unexampled events, which are forcing themselves every moment on our observation, and which call aloud on all the sons of men to reflect and to repent. I felt it to be my indispensable duty, in this my last solemn address to you, to press upon you every motive to a holy life that could influence the heart of man, and with this view to draw your attention to all those astonishing scenes that are daily passing before your eyes, and which add irresistible force to every thing that has been advanced in the course of these Lectures. You now see displayed, in visible characters, in the actual vicissitudes of almost evey hour, those great truths which I have been for four years past inculcating in words; the uncertainty of every earthly blessing, the vanity of all human pursuits, the instability of all worldly happiness, and the absolute necessity of looking out for some more solid ground to stand upon, some more durable treasures on which to fix our affections and our hearts. For many years past God has been speaking to us by the various dispensations of his providence, by acts of mercy and of justice, by his interpositions to save us, by his judgments to correct us. He has been speaking a language which cannot be misunderstood, a language which is heard in every quarter of the globe, which makes all nature tremble, and shakes the very foundations of the earth.

Yet still, though there is just cause for apprehension, there is no occasion for despair. If from these judgments of the Lord, we learn that lesson they were meant to teach us; if we turn, without delay, from the evil of our

* This Lecture was given in the Spring of the year 1801.

ways; if we humble ourſelves under the mighty hand of God, and acknowledge our tranſgreſſions with the trueſt penitence and contrition of ſoul; if we ſet ourſelves in earneſt to relinquiſh every vicious habit, every ſecret fault, as well as every preſumptuous ſin; if we deny ourſelves, and take up our croſs to follow Chriſt; if we lay our follies, our vanities, our gaieties, our criminal indulgencies, at the feet of our Redeemer, and purify ourſelves even as he is pure; if in theſe times of unexampled ſcarcity of all the neceſſaries of life, we open our hearts and our hands wide to the neceſſities of our ſuffering brethren; if, in ſhort, by the purity of our hearts, the ſanctity of our lives, the fervor of our devotions, the ſincerity of our faith and confidence in Chriſt, we recommend ourſelves to the favor of heaven, I ſcruple not to ſay, that we have nothing to fear. By the mighty hand *of God we ſhall* be protected here; by the merits of him who died for us we ſhall be ſaved and rewarded hereafter. And we may, I truſt, in this caſe, humbly apply to ourſelves that conſolatory declaration of the Almighty to another people, with which I ſhall finally cloſe theſe Lectures; and which may God in his infinite mercy confirm to us all in this world, and in the next!

"How can I give thee up, Ephraim? My ſoul is turned within me. I will not execute the fierceneſs of my anger, for I am God, and not man. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment: but with everlaſting kindneſs * will I have mercy upon thee†."

* This *kindneſs* has in fact (as far as the public welfare is concerned) been in ſeveral important inſtances moſt graciouſly and conſpicuouſly extended ſo this highly favoured land ſince theſe Lectures were finiſhed; and it evidently calls for every return on our part of affection and obedience to our heavenly Benefactor, that the deepeſt ſenſe of gratitude can poſſibly dictate to devout and feeling hearts.—March, 1802.

† Hoſea, xi. 8, 9. Iſaiah, liv. 8.

THE END.

JUL 4 1980